

# **The eternal and the contemporary**

*Exhibition architecture at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893.  
An inquiry into its conception, purpose and effect.*

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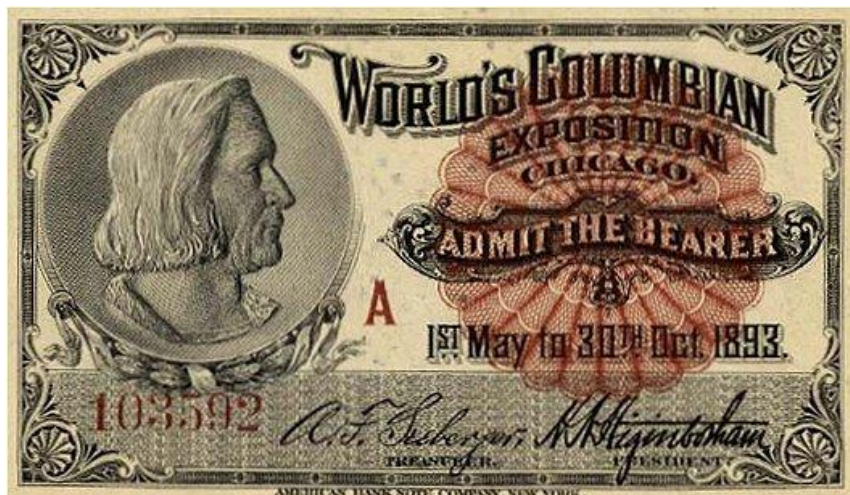
The helpful staff at The Chicago History Museum and The Art Institute of Chicago.

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## Summary

This thesis will deal with the exhibition architecture that could be seen at The World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893. The work's aim is to briefly trace the background for this World's Fair, to lay out the decision making process and the reasoning behind the choices that were made in relation to the architectural scheme. Further the work will use the insight gained through this examination to analyze selected structures at the fair grounds, in White City as it came to be known. These two parts will then offer the canvas needed in an analysis of how it might have been to visit this White City. What sort of setting did the architecture create, what sort of behavior did it encourage, or allow, and what types of narratives did it beget. This will be done through selected first hand accounts from the time of the fair and through an approach of Mieke Bal's method of narratology assisted by Jacques Derrida's theories concerning *ergon* and *parergon* and how this relates to an architectural frame.

There are a great many works, of almost every conceivable nature, that in some way touches upon the events of the fair. It was a seminal event in American history. Yet, not many deal with the architecture in detail, of not only how the buildings looked, but also how they "lived" and operated. This is to an extent also the case with the choice of this architecture and the causes of the choices made, many have, or have had, opinions of its worth, but not many have tried to examine this process in some depth. This is what this work will attempt to do.

## Introduction

In the middle of the 1880's an idea began to germinate in the leading cities of America, the idea that America should pick up the mantle of the ever more popular World Fairs and use the opportunity of the coming 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus' discovery of the New World to stage one themselves. The Centennial Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia had been a great success, but had since been eclipsed by the later European ones, and when Americans saw the marvels of the 1889 exposition in Paris, and its very small American presence, there could no longer be any doubt: "By the holy Moses," the businessman Chauncey Depew exclaimed, "the American people must arise and redeem itself from this monstrous perversion," they must arrange a fair of their own to convey a true image of "...what the real resources and products of the United States are."<sup>1</sup> Such were the ambitions of the Americans and such were the expectations of the participants with Henry Trueman Wood, a British exhibition commissioner, stating that: "France had had the best and the biggest exhibition. America must have a better, and, above all, a bigger one."<sup>2</sup> After a hard fought competition with other cities, Chicago gained the right to stage the event, the right to host the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. The finished exposition covered an area of over 600 acres (2, 5 square kilometers), twice the size of Paris 1889, some 200 buildings were constructed and the fair received about 27 million visitors in its 6 month run. Perhaps more than celebrating Columbus' anniversary the event was extolled as a coming out party of sorts for America. Here the young nation, and even younger city, would lay evidence to its success and progress, prove parity with, or even promote the notion that the new was now indeed surpassing the old world. This was to be a showcase for their industrial prowess, ingenuity, artistic excellence, and advancing civilization. What was constructed was a giant dream like city in the classical and academic styles, sculpted out of a plaster material called "staff" and all painted in radiant white. What else could one call it but "White City" and its centerpiece where most of the largest exhibition halls were congregated named the "Court of Honor." Visitors were awestruck by what they encountered and many were inspired to wax lyrical, as for example the poet Richard Watson Gilder who wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Chauncey Depew as quoted in: Robert D. Parmet, "Competition for the World's Columbian Exposition: The New York Campaign," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1908-1984). Vol. 65, No. 4 (Winter, 1972). pp. 367-368

<sup>2</sup> Henry Trueman Wood, "Chicago and Its Exhibition," *Nineteenth Century* 31 (April 1892) p. 558, as cited in: Arnold Lewis, *An early encounter with tomorrow, Europeans, Chicago's Loop and The World's Columbian Exposition*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997) p. 167



### **The Vanishing City**

...  
Oh, never as here in the eternal years  
Hath burst to bloom man's free and soaring spirit,  
...  
Never so swift the mind's imaginings  
Caught sculptured form, and color. Never before  
Save where the soul beats unembodied wings  
Gainst viewless skies was such enchanted shore  
Jeweled with ivory palaces like these :  
By day a miracle, a dream by night;  
Yet real as beauty is, and as the seas  
Whose waves glance back keen lines of glittering light  
...  
The scene, my soul, till ever 't is thine own !  
This is Art's citadel and crown.  
...  
Here where the visual sense faints to its goal !  
Ah, silent multitudes, ye are a part  
Of the wise architect's supreme and glorious art !<sup>3</sup>

These sentiments, of wonder, excitement, and filled with heavenly allegories, are commonplace in contemporary literature from the Chicago fair. The exposition was at the time hugely popular, but in later years (especially from the 1920's through to the 1970's) the exposition, and specifically its architecture, came into harsh criticism. The architecture on display, the detractors felt, was an opportunity missed and a step in the wrong direction, a step backwards into European historicism. Contemporary foreign commentators also voiced disappointment at not seeing more of the "modern" architecture that was widespread in the commercial centre of Chicago. This is one of the main issues of this thesis, to examine how exactly this architecture looked like, what it consisted of, and most importantly, how and why it was chosen. After doing so, the wish is then to take the analysis one step further and investigate how this architecture, these buildings, functioned as modern exhibition halls and how their manner affected the visitor. How did the style and monumentality of the buildings make, or encourage, people to behave? How did the buildings facilitate their visit, what type

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Watson Gilder, excerpt from the poem "Vanishing City," published in: *The Great Remembrance and other poems by Richard Watson Gilder* (New York: Century CO, 1893) pp. 31-33

of experience did they “allow”, or not “allow”, for the visitors? And what was the nature of interaction between the inside and outside of the buildings, and between the frame of the facades and the contained exhibitions? In brief, what this work will deal with, is to explore the nature of the architecture in White City and at the Court of Honor, the centre stage of the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. How this architecture came to be, the relationship between architecture and exhibition, and its possible implications on the narrative of the fair, illustrated through the experiences of some of its visitors. This will be done in the following way:

- *Chapter 1.*

This chapter is an introductory one, sketching the historical background of Chicago and the fair. It will trace the evolution of Chicago after the great fire of 1871, illustrate the architectural trends in the city at the time, compare this with the situation on the east coast and outline the bidding process and competition to hold the fair.

- *Chapter 2.*

This chapter is an inquiry into the organization of the fair, of how it came to be where it was and look how it did. Special emphasis will here be put on the role of Daniel Burnham, as Consulting Architect, Chief of Construction and Director of Works. It will chart the decision making process behind the selection of architects, the views held by these architects concerning their commission and how all this amounted to the resulting choices.

- *Chapter 3.*

This chapter is an analysis of two of the exhibition halls seen in White City, the Electricity Building and Machinery Hall, their construction, appearance and function. What was the nature of these buildings, what was their underlying *purpose* as seen by the architects, and what did the visitors see when moving around and into these buildings?

- *Chapter 4.*

This chapter is an analysis of what types of narratives the created works made possible, how these affected the visitors and how they experienced them. How did they act in relation to the possible narratives in accounts of how some of the visitors saw and used these buildings. How

did the buildings function as exhibition halls and how did the architects' *purpose* relate to this function?

- *Chapter 5.*

This chapter will serve as an epilogue where the fair's legacy is discussed, before a summary of this thesis' "legacy", where its lessons and education are contemplated.

### **Approach: Theory, method and previous research in the field**

Each of the main chapters will see different tools employed for different means of analysis. These will primarily be introduced and explained in the parts where they are used for in this way to achieve a better level of integration with the source material. It is felt that to have closeness of theory and practice will yield gainful results for the understanding of both these parts and their relationship to each other. The idea is that when one has the theory fresh in mind, for both the writer and the subsequent reader, that the following analysis will be better implemented with the subject matter and its methods easier to follow. This is especially the case in chapter 4 where the focus shifts from the planning process and the architecture in itself to the narratives they create and their impact on the experiences of visitors. The methods of analysis must then also change and a new approach is presented at the start of that chapter. Material from the fair is varied and bountiful, and one needs a structured way of dealing with this material. This approach must further be able to incorporate different aspects and elements into a cohesive whole which then may be analyzed in an ordered manner. On these merits the chosen approach in question will be Mieke Bal's method of narratology. Bal states about her approach that: "Narratology is the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that "tell a story." Such a theory help to understand, analyse and evaluate narratives."<sup>4</sup> The fair is here the narrative, the buildings, the architecture and the surrounding grounds is a narrative text, and the visitors are "characters" in this text. Bal further states the value of such a theory, in relation to both the subject matter and to the work where it is used (in the case of this quote related to the museum, and museum studies, but which is of course easily valid for a world's exposition and this study as well):

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<sup>4</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology, Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Third Edition, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985/2009) p. 3

It seems to be impossible to conduct an analysis of exposition without clarifying to what extent and under which conditions and modalities writing is irremediably bound up with what it attempts to explore...But the rhetoric of persuasion functions within a discursive situation that is also narrative. The tools of analysis, therefore, are best selected and employed in an integration of rhetoric and the theory of narrative (narratology)...The narratological perspective provides meaning to the otherwise loose elements of such a reading. Most importantly, the analysis aims to yield, on the one hand, an integrated account of the discursive strategies put into effect by the museum's expository agent (the curators), and, on the other hand, the effective process of meaning-making that these strategies suggest to the visitor. The reading itself, then, becomes part of the meaning it yields. And this seems an important insight, for what are museums for if not visitors?<sup>5</sup>

In accordance with the first half of the above statement, this is what is attempted in the preceding chapters of 1 through 3. Here the groundwork will be laid as in relation to what will later be explored. The basis for this work is the use of historical method, in examining some of the many first hand accounts and works from the fair, complemented through the use of later scholarly work, and material gathered from the archives of The Chicago History Museum and The Art Institute of Chicago. For the latter half this entails the systematic approach of narratology on: the buildings themselves, on the architecture as defined through the prior chapters, what sort of narrative and story these provide, and how visitors encountered and behaved within this *story*. This is in Bal's method the *fabula*, how the narrative is understood and acted upon by the "characters", the visitors. This then, is not an "opinion poll" or examination of public reception of the fair, but an examination of the work proper, the architecture and the fair itself. Here the testimonies of selected witnesses are analyzed in accordance with the narratological approach, and in this way investigates how their experiences, their *fabula*, interacts with and becomes part of the work's *fabula*. Of how these testimonies becomes part of the larger narrative and cultural phenomenon of the fair. The works that have been looked at have been chosen on the grounds of their independence from the official sources and their reliability. These include first and foremost: Theodore Dreiser's *Newspaper Days*,<sup>6</sup> and Hildegard Hawthorne's *The Fairest of the Fair*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mieke Bal, *Double exposures, the subject of cultural analysis*, (New York / London: Routledge, 1996) p. 7

<sup>6</sup> Theodore Dreiser, *Newspaper Days*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) p. 312, originally published in 1922 in an expurgated form under the name *A story about myself* and then re-issued in 1931 as *Newspaper days*, unexpurgated.

<sup>7</sup> Hildegard Hawthorne, *The Fairest of the Fair*, (Henry Altemus Company: Philadelphia, 1894)

The catalog of works which, in part or in their entirety, deals with the topic of The World's Columbian Exposition is vast. If one is looking for a complete overview of works that are in some way dedicated to the fair, such a thing exists. In Bertuca, Hartmann and Neumeister's *The World's Columbian Exposition, A Centennial Bibliographic Guide*<sup>8</sup> one has the ultimate overview (it describes over 6000 books, articles and other materials). The fair was such a colossal undertaking, its buildings so monumental and its popularity so great, that this alone would generate and inspire many a volume, which then again have inspired an abundance of scholarly work in later years. Since the amount and scope of material is so large, a process was needed to reduce it to a manageable and representative selection. In relation to the scope of this work, because of the insurmountable number of possible sources, great emphasis have been put on the selection and use of secondary literature and the work done by other researchers. In this regard key authoritative works have been identified and been availed of because of their properties in providing reliable insight into different aspect of the field at hand. Of these one may mention William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis*<sup>9</sup> for its work on Chicago's social, economic and environmental conditions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Arnold Lewis's *An early encounter with tomorrow*<sup>10</sup> for its sumptuous picture of Chicago's cultural and architectural history, as well as providing a vivid image of how the city was viewed by outsiders from the east and from Europe. Thomas S. Hines' *Burnham of Chicago*<sup>11</sup> for the persona and career of Daniel Burnham, and specifically for the nature of his involvement in the World's Columbian Exposition. *Space, Time and Architecture*<sup>12</sup> by Sigfried Giedion for its outline of the evolution of the commercial and skyscraper architecture of Chicago, and architectural and engineering innovations connected with this. This work has also been valuable for its opinions on the exposition's architecture as seen from a staunch modernist viewpoint, and in this way highly illustrative of the predominant position held about the fair and its style for the better part of half a century, i.e. that it was a mistake, creative indolence, a missed opportunity to show and advance a "modern" and American architecture. As such,

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<sup>8</sup> David J. Bertuca, senior compiler, Donal K. Hartmann and Susan M. Neumeister, co-compilers, *The World's Columbian Exposition, A Centennial Bibliographic Guide*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996)

<sup>9</sup> William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, (New York: Norton, 1992)

<sup>10</sup> Arnold Lewis, *An early encounter with tomorrow, Europeans, Chicago's Loop and The World's Columbian Exposition*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997)

<sup>11</sup> Thomas S. Hines, *Burnham of Chicago*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974)

<sup>12</sup> Giedion, Sigfried, *Space, Time and Architecture, the growth of a new tradition* (Camebridge MA: Harvard University Press, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 1967)

these four works (in collation with others) provides a framework for the cultural, urban and architectural background of the fair.

The most important sources are nevertheless the ones of a primary nature and the theoretic light in which these are read and used. Of such works one may for example include most of the early accounts published at time of, or shortly after, the fair, with many of them written in pure exuberance. Here one may mention the immense *A History of The World's Columbian Exposition*<sup>13</sup> edited by Rossiter Johnson in four volumes as a prime example. The work deals with all aspects of the fair in meticulous detail, from inception and planning to all the different buildings, their contents, and the different events which took place during the fair's run. If one is looking for facts, figures and general overview it is a fine work. In this light one also have the many guide books to the fair, in varying sizes and for all purposes, from for example pocket books of exhibition highlights to the more extravagant as Henry Davenport Northrop, *The World's Fair, As seen in one hundred days*<sup>14</sup>, including information about Chicago itself, where to stay, public transport etc. For more of an insiders view and insight into the decision making process, *The Final Report* by Daniel Burnham reprinted by Garland Publishing<sup>15</sup> is an invaluable source and primary document. In this regard the archival research done (which consisted of looking at architectural drawings, blueprints and trade journals in the case of the Chicago History Museum's holdings, and administrative letters and speeches in the Daniel H. Burnham's Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago) was very helpful and inspirational. Among these first hand accounts The Chicago History Museum's volumes of *The Inland Architect and News Record* have been particularly valuable, as has the anthology of Henry van Brunt's essays issued by The Harvard University Press<sup>16</sup>, in gaining an insight into thoughts and understanding of architecture by its practitioners at the time. Towards this end, some underlying architectural theory has also been essential, and in this regard works on Viollet-le-Duc and Gottfried Semper have been consulted as they were two of the most important theoreticians at the time. These have also been put into the wider context of

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<sup>13</sup> Rossiter Johnson, ed., *A History of The World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893*, in four volumes, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897)

<sup>14</sup> Henry Davenport Northrop, *The World's Fair, As seen in one hundred days*, (Philadelphia: Ariel Book Company, 1893)

<sup>15</sup> Daniel H. Burnham, *The Final Official Report of the Director of Works of the World's Columbian Exposition*, June 1894 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989)

<sup>16</sup> Henry Van Brunt, *Architecture and Society, Selected Essays of Henry Van Brunt*, (Cambridge, Ma.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969)

organicist architecture through Caroline van Eck's work<sup>17</sup> wherein Leon Batista Alberti's theories of architectural unity come into play. Through the use of this architectural history and theory the central concept of *purpose* is derived. The architects' *purpose* of creating a unified artistic image based on a sympathy of parts (as inspired by nature) that could educate and move the public. This is a concept by which the understanding of this type of architecture at the time, and in some sense of architecture as a whole, is illuminated, and hence explored through the questions of if the results are in line with the architects thinking, and the buildings' actual function and purpose? As buildings built in pronounced historical styles they will also be looked at in this light. Here, and in the later parts of analysis, two buildings have been singled out for scrutiny and illustration: The Electricity Building and Machinery Hall. These two have been selected by virtue of their commissions, as they are advantageous as subject matter in looking at the buildings as modern exhibition halls, seeing as their mission was to house some of the most advanced innovation of the day. This would then be in contrast with their classical exteriors. These halls had at previous world's fairs often been some of the most modern and most popular buildings. As such they would be the most beneficial to investigate through and analysis of purpose, narrative and framing.

To link these thoughts and analysis on architecture with the theory of narrative and the visitor's share an "external" component will be used for this end. This is Jacques Derrida's ideas on the work, the *frame*, and the extrinsic; the *ergon* and the *parergon*, as formulated in his work *The truth in painting*<sup>18</sup>. The concept of the *frame* will here be used about the walls and facades of the buildings and how these resonate inwards and outwards. Derrida likens the *parergon* to the frame of a painting (or as the walls of a building) and writes that:

A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done, the fact, the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board. It is first of all the on (the) border...without being a part of it, yet without being absolutely extrinsic to it<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Caroline van Eck, *Organicism in nineteenth-century architecture, an inquiry into its theoretical and philosophical background*, (Architectura & Natura Press: Amsterdam, 1994)

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987)

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* pp. 54-55

In this way the walls and facades of the building becomes the *frame*, the *parergon*. They are the “border,” the first things encountered and the link between the outside and inside, and as such, decisive for the narrative and how the visitor relates to it. Here though, one does well in mentioning that this is also an extensive field were other perspectives might have also been employed, and works by Bernhard Tschumi for example come to mind. In his work *The Manhattan Chronicles*<sup>20</sup> for instance, Tschumi prescribes a reading of architecture as “programs,” which may open “a field of research where spaces are finally confronted with what happens in them.”<sup>21</sup> This is by examining the different “events” and “movements” taking place which then combined may prescribe an architectural “narrative.” Tschumi was himself highly inspired by Derrida’s deconstructionalism, and his analytic method may very well have proved interesting, but Derrida’s work have here been chosen for its primary nature and because of its relation to Bal’s work.

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<sup>20</sup> Bernhard Tschumi, *The Manhattan Chronicles*, (London: Academy Editions, 1994)

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. xxvi



# 1.

This chapter will focus on events leading up to the exposition in 1893. The aim is to outline the architectural and urban evolution predating the events of the fair, in Chicago, but also in the established east, and in such a way illustrate the way of living and structural outlook at the scene of the coming World's Fair. Here especially those of an architectural nature, to show the current working environment in Chicago and the rest of the country for its architects; the form of commissions given, styles used and buildings built. The chapter will in this way briefly trace the resurrection of Chicago after the great fire of 1871, explain the character of the new city and how that was viewed by outsiders, juxtapose it with traditions in the east before sketching the bidding process for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.

## **Out of the embers: Chicago 1871 - 1891**

One dark night, when people were in bed,  
Mrs. O' Leary lit a lantern in her shed,  
The cow kicked it over, winked its eye, and said,  
There'll be a hot time in the old town tonight.<sup>22</sup>

On the 8th of October 1871 a small fire began in Catherine and Patrick O'Leary's barn on 137 DeKoven Street. The cause of the fire is still debated; the story carried in the contemporary newspapers was of one of the O'Leary's cows kicking over a lantern. Daniel "Pegleg" Sullivan might also have been the culprit though, kicking over a lantern while attempting to steal some milk. Another story tells of one Louis M. Cohn kicking over the same lantern while escaping Mrs. O'Leary's scorn when caught conducting a craps game in her barn. Mr. Cohn allegedly confessed to his crime in a will upon his death in 1944, said will have since been lost. Later research on the witness testimonies resulted in the Chicago City Council in 1997 recommending that Sullivan officially be recorded as the starter of the fire, by accident. Whoever caused it, the fire was devastating. When finally put out two days later on October 10<sup>th</sup> it had claimed the lives of 300 Chicagoans, left approximately a hundred thousand homeless and destroyed 10 square kilometers of the downtown area, with about \$200 million in property damages. The Great Fire had laid waste to almost the entire city and the

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<sup>22</sup> Hannah Higgins, *The Grid Book*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009) p. 1

burgeoning metropolis merely 30 years old was forced to start again. Out of the ruins a new city rose, with new materials and new myths. Resurrection. As William Cronon writes, even amidst the tragedy and destruction “...all the old booster arguments about the predestined inevitability of Chicago’s metropolitan growth reemerged,”<sup>23</sup> to be the central city, a point of convergence chosen by providence, to see the city not as it was, but how it could be. Here, after the Great Fire coalescing into “...a metaphorical image that appeared repeatedly for the next quarter century: the city as a phoenix, that magical bird that could find rebirth even in the ashes of its own funeral pyre.”<sup>24</sup> The hinterland and infrastructure around the city was still intact and the industrial features of lumber yards, grain elevators, meat packing factories and stockyards all untouched by the fire. Not long after the dire events of October the mood shifted, empty land meant new opportunities and a construction boom soon occurred which again skyrocketed property values. In 1884 the view about the fire was now one of a galvanized serendipity, what was horrible had actually proven quite “wonderful,” with an official guidebook to the city reading: “The great fire, modernized the city, leveling the ground and rendering possible the uniform elegance of the business portion.”<sup>25</sup> In 1890 this view was even more pronounced when a visitor stated that: “...at this moment no one doubts that it was a great blessing. It was the death of old Chicago and the birth of a new and better Chicago, better fitted in a thousand ways to fulfill destiny.”<sup>26</sup> What then was so new and great about this “second city”, how did the differences manifest themselves and how did they relate to contemporary practices and what was to come?

Being incorporated as a city as late as 1837 and as shown above virtually flattened in 1871, Chicago was in many ways a city devoid of an architectonic past.<sup>27</sup> As the city increased its population 36.7 times in the period from 1850 – 1890, and doubled its numbers twice in the period from the great fire in 1871 to the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893 (from approximately 300 000 to about 1.2 million), the building of Chicago<sup>28</sup> was to be characterized by practicality and efficiency, not by evolution, history or tradition. In *Stranger’s Guide* (to Chicago) from 1883 one could read:

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<sup>23</sup> William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, (New York: Norton, 1992) p. 345

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p. 346

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p. 348

<sup>27</sup> See for example: Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1987) pp. 336-338

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed contemporary account of Chicago’s architectural evolution and situation, see: *Industrial Chicago: The Building Interests*, (Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1891)

In no period since 1830 has the city experienced such wonderful development in increase of population, trade and building up...in 1882... The character of the buildings are [*sic*] monstrous and costly... There is such a demand for business and office quarters that the permit to build a block is no sooner obtained than applications are made for renting apartments, and before the building is completed it is all rented and the renters are ready to step in with their implements of trade. Block after block mount up into the clouds overhanging the city from every street and avenue.<sup>29</sup>

The new business district of Chicago, The Loop, best illustrates this boom and this new type of architecture. Receiving its name because of the cable cars running in a loop around Wabash, State, Madison and Lake streets before going back in their respective directions, the name has since come to cover Chicago's entire downtown area enclosed by the Chicago River to the north and west, Lake Michigan to the east and Roosevelt Road to the south. This new Chicago would be organized in an orderly grid out from the point zero of the Washington and State Street intersection and all buildings were to be fireproofed. The needs of the mid-west and Chicago's hinterland of its center increased the sense of urgency after the great fire, and as Chicago again boomed its own increasing needs again fueled the rapid pace of construction and hence the property prices with them. The then normal type of construction would not suffice neither in relation to size, build speed nor to the new safety regulations. As such the coming architecture was to be shaped by construction and by the engineers conducting it, searching out the new potentialities of the field," ...potentialities which had hitherto been exploited only in bridges and industrial structures of various kinds."<sup>30</sup> This could first and foremost be seen in the new office buildings being erected in the 1880's with its revolutionary use of the skeleton frame and greater heights (to best extract the maximum rent from the property). Inhere the supporting elements are the interior cast iron (and later steel) columns and girders and not solid stone walls. Its earliest advocate and applier was the engineer and architect William le Baron Jenney who first used the new principles of a simplified frame and increased verticality on his Home Insurance Company building (fig. 1.) in 1884-85. John B. Gass a visitor from the Royal Institute of British Architects described the construction thus:

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<sup>29</sup> As cited in: Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture, the growth of a new tradition*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 1967) p. 369

<sup>30</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture, the growth of a new tradition*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 1967) p. 370

The outer walls are of brick with stone or terra cotta dressings. In the Home Insurance Company's building, iron columns run up the full height in the centre of brick piers; iron window lintels rest on the columns. It is of fire-proof construction, with cast iron columns and wrought iron girders encased in terra-cotta: the floors are arches of hollow tile, wooden flooring on sleepers above. Internal partitions are of hollow tile, which being light can be set on floors at any point, and the offices are divided and made the size required by tenant.<sup>31</sup>



Figure 1.  
The Home Insurance Company Building  
W.L.B. Jenney, Completed 1884, demolished. 1931

Building in this way one could reduce the weight of the construction to one tenth of that of a stone wall load bearing one, and as such it was possible to build to ever enhanced heights with reduced costs and in the process also make it fire resistant. With the slim iron columns as the load bearing features it was also possible to create large open spaces on each floor and ensure natural light to all areas of the structures. Tenants could themselves decide the sizes and design of their offices and workshops and in this way facilitate maximum suitability and occupancy. This way of building soon dominated the Loop area, and would with the style as described, in

concord with its use of tall, elongated and horizontal uniform windows resting on the columns and girders, and focus on well proportioned structures based on the simplest and most rational solutions, be known as Chicago construction. The following Chicago school (composing such architectural luminaries as the mentioned Jenney, Dankmar Adler, Louis H. Sullivan, Daniel H. Burnham and John W. Root) strove to combine engineering and architecture in the quest for a new form, where in union neither one would decide over the other. Hence the buildings' most important influences would be their function and the needs of the people commissioning them. Embellishments were minimal and their shapes practical, rectangles to fit the city's new gridiron plan.

Chicago's mode of operation changed with the new cityscape. Speed and effectivization were the catchphrases of the day, and for perhaps the first time, time was literally money. The mood of the city was one of movement and adaptability; if something didn't work you tried

<sup>31</sup> As cited in: Arnold Lewis, *An early encounter with tomorrow, Europeans, Chicago's Loop and The World's Columbian Exposition*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997) p. 112

something else. Action was imperative, contemplate and linger on an issue too long and someone else would move ahead. The streets of The Loop were some of the busiest in the world with non-stop activity. The writer Charles King, in attempting to catch the pulse of the city, described an evening at the corner of State and Madison Streets in this way:

Collisions, shocks, wild plunges for hats that go skimming among the trampling feet; crash in the streets, locking wheels, cracking whips, plunging horses, declamatory policemen, blaspheming drivers, slang, billingsgate, uproar, clatter, ear-piercing screams...Clang, lang, lang. "Who you shovin?" Clang, lang, lang. Bang, bang, bang. Yells. Shouts. Furious clanger of gongs. Rush, uproar. Hi! hi there! Look out! LOOK OUT! Bang. Bang. Clang. OUT OF THE WAY! Rush-scurry.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 2.  
State and Madison Streets, ca. 1900.

The city was indeed a hectic place to be and a challenging place to live. Visitors and foreigners were often uneasy about the pace and rate of change in the city. American visitors would criticize what they perceived as the rough nature of the city; its lack of culture, its high alcohol consumption, its crime and corruption. Europeans on the other hand were more concerned about the subsistence of the city; its haste,

its transitoriness, its lifestyle choices so to speak. The criticism of the architecture springing out from this mode was also significant. Chicago's buildings were slighted as something crude and fragile, cut off from tradition. British and French voices were at their most critical in the early stages, in the late 1870's and early 1880's, pointing to the American naiveté in art and accusing their buildings for lacking in sophistication, "proportion, refinement and harmony."<sup>33</sup> They thought the facades in particular lacked quality and were not convinced by the Americans' use of light plaster materials and iron framing. They were in the opinion of that this ruined the relation between design and support and hid the actual structural reality of the building. Nevertheless, no one denied the opportunities available and the advancements

<sup>32</sup> Charles King as cited in: Arnold Lewis, op. cit. p. 74

<sup>33</sup> Arnold Lewis, op. cit. p. 106

being made, this was a new way of living, a new way of building; if one only had the right sense of venture all would be well.

No enjoyment and not sorrow,  
Is our destined end or way;  
But to act, that each to-morrow  
Finds us farther than to-day.  
Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!  
Let the dead past bury its dead!  
Act – act in the living present!  
Heart within, and God o'erhead.  
Let us then be up and doing  
With a heart for any fate;  
Still achieving, still pursuing  
Learn to labor and to wait<sup>34</sup>



Figure 3.  
Dearborn Street, The Loop, Chicago, 1892

This poem by American national poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow from 1838 perfectly captures the spirit of the country in general and Chicago at the time in question in particular. The only time was now, and the only way was forward, and in Chicago's sense, upwards. There was no time for fanciful projects or constructions if they were not practical or could immediately generate revenue. Still the inhabitants of Chicago and the architects of its new city did definitely not feel as if they were cutting corners or compromising in any way, they were doing something different, something new, something modern and were striving towards a purity of form. John Root, the partner of

Daniel Burnham, and the constructors of for example the Monadnock Building, the Ashland Block and the Reliance Building (figs. 4-6), summed up his thoughts about the modern business building and architecture that:

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<sup>34</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life," first published 1838, retrieved from: bartleby.com, September 21, 2011: <<http://www.bartleby.com/102/55.html>>

...to lavish upon them profusion of delicate ornaments is worse than useless...Rather should they by their mass and proportion convey in some large elemental sense an idea of the great, stable, conserving forces of modern civilization. One result...will be the resolution of our architectural designs into their essential elements. So vital has the underlying structure of these buildings become, that it must dictate absolutely the general departure of external forms...Under these conditions we are compelled to work definitely with definite aims, permeating ourselves with the full spirit of the age, that we may give its architecture true art forms.<sup>35</sup>

As one can read, Root too believed in the honesty of construction, that the load bearing and guiding elements were indeed not hidden, but reflected in the minimalistic use of external embellishment, letting instead the building as a whole convey art and beauty through the basic forms of the modern age. The new style would soon receive greater appreciation and Paul Bourget, a French novelist would comment in 1893, on the eve of the World's Columbian Exposition, that with:

...the simple force of need as a principle of beauty...There is so little caprice and fancy in these monuments as these streets that they seem to be the work of some impersonal power, irresistible, unconscious, like a force of nature, in the service of which man has been but a docile instrument. It is this expression of the overpowering immensity of modern commerce which gives to the city something of tragedy, and to my feeling, a poetry.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 4.  
The Monadnock Building,  
Burnham & Root, Completed 1893



Figure 5.  
The Ashland Block,  
Burnham & Root, Completed 1892,  
Demolished 1949



Figure 6.  
The Reliance Building  
Burnham & Root, Completed 1895

<sup>35</sup> John Wellborn Root as cited in: Sigfried Giedion, op. cit. p. 382

<sup>36</sup> Paul Bourget as cited in: Sigfried Giedion, op. cit. p. 381

## Architectural precursors

As one may see from the previous quote by Bourget, Europeans were by the early 1890's starting to come to an appreciation of the sights of Chicago, albeit not of course an entirely unmitigated one. Some reservations about the crudeness of the city were still maintained, but in terms of its architecture it was gaining increasing approval. What was most often heralded was its boldness and lack, or rejection, of tradition. As a new century grew closer American, and particularly Chicagoan, architecture was gaining praise for its "antihistoricism," its freedom from the "eternal laws" of the Grand Tradition, i.e. classicism and neo-classicism. César Daly, a French magazine editor, for example exclaimed that American architect treated the past as "an orange which he squeezes and sucks dry before tossing the peel away,"<sup>37</sup> that he freely chose which principles to maintain and which to disregard. That the American architect consorted only with practicality and the immediate needs of function to create an architecture free from history, resulting in an effect, as the author of a special issue on Chicago business buildings in the British architectural journal the *Builder* put it, that the "...typical Chicago buildings impress by mass, not by detail. Their finest quality is that of immensity, and the less fronts are broken up, the less the walls are interrupted by piers or strings, the more imposing the structure and the more tremendous the effect."<sup>38</sup> Naturally the architects of Chicago were not devoid of history, but were responding to the shifting needs of their time and place. As we shall see, these architects were indeed carrying on earlier theoretic tenets, furthering them indeed, but nevertheless guided by earlier principles.

Granted, one cannot ascertain for sure who and what instructed the different architects in which way, but it is possible to discern certain overarching features from previous theoreticians and exponents of ideas. In regards to past architectural theorists there are two names that come to mind as inspirational on the Chicago school in terms of their writings, they are Eugène Viollet-le-Duc and Gottfried Semper.<sup>39</sup> Here it is important to stress that

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<sup>37</sup> As cited in: Arnold Lewis, op. cit. p. 86

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p. 199

<sup>39</sup> John W. Root for example translated Semper's: "Development of architectural style" in 1889 for *The Inland Architect*, and Viollet-le-Duc's *Entretiens* was translated and published in America as early as 1870. See for example Daniel D. Reiff's, "Viollet-le-Duc and American 19th Century Architecture," for an account of Viollet-le-Duc's influence and Carl W. Condit's *The Chicago School of Architecture: A History of Commercial and Public Building in the Chicago Area, 1875-1925* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964) for Semper's. Here one may for example read on p. 98 that: "In following Semper the Chicago architects put themselves in the



what one is talking about are their general concepts and theoretical teachings and not necessarily their styles of construction.<sup>40</sup> These concepts and theories gain bearing here in their discourses on “style” and the use of new materials and techniques, particularly employed in “buildings of a decidedly practical purpose.”<sup>41</sup> Of the two, Viollet-le-Duc might be said to be the greater contributor upon the Chicago school, and also on American architecture in a wider context. His books were rapidly translated and published for the American market. For example, perhaps his most widely read and most influential work, the *Entretiens sur l'architecture* published in France in 1863<sup>42</sup> was reviewed in *The Nation* by Henry van Brunt as early as 1866. The book was widely discussed in the following years and translated in parts in 1870 by the *Manufacturer and Builder* before being translated in full (volume I) by van Brunt in 1875 as *Discourses on Architecture*. Here Viollet-le-Duc formulated his basic rules of architecture as: “The open and honest use of iron in modern construction; a theory of architectural design based on structural rationalism;...a thorough understanding of historic architecture,” and a “...vigorous condemnation of the classical style taught by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.”<sup>43</sup> The principles were that each age should express its own time in its architecture, using the newest materials and best innovations of the day, which in this age meant the candid employment of iron. And then not only as ornamental or subsidiary elements, but as exposed structural elements. This was already quite commonplace in American architecture, but the theoretical support served to encourage an already blossoming practice. Viollet-le-Duc’s impact might then be felt most by his advocacy of a structural rationalism, that buildings should follow the requirements of the day, and that the form adopted should be taken from the most practical means and materials available. Henry van Brunt for example would write in the introduction to his translation of *Entretiens* that:

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mainstream of eighteenth and nineteenth-century thinking about adaptation...In him they felt an ally, hostile to the survival or revival of historic forms, demanding a new, modern form, expressive of american ambitions. They became conscious of living in a modern time, one that was unique in history...Since the times had changed, it must be that a new idea was required, one related to the qualities of the new times.”

<sup>40</sup> For a good and to the point introduction to the theoretical foundations of modern architecture, see chapter 1 in William J. R. Curtis’ *Modern Architecture since 1900* (London: Phaidon, 1992 3<sup>rd</sup> edition) pp. 21-31

<sup>41</sup> Gottfried Semper as cited in Sokratis Georgadis’ introduction to Sigfried Giedion’s, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferroconcrete*, (The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities: Santa Monica, 1995) p. 9

<sup>42</sup> This is the first edition of the first of two volumes of *Entretiens*. The last editions of both volumes were published in 1872

<sup>43</sup> Daniel D. Reiff, “Viollet-le-Duc and American 19th Century Architecture,” *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984-), Vol. 42, No. 1 (Autumn, 1988) p. 34

Viollet-le-Duc endeavors to set forth the true sources of design; how to best analyze, classify and use the enormous accumulation of precedents in all styles,...how to receive the developments of modern science in the arts of construction, and how to give them place and due expression in our modern architecture <sup>44</sup>

Highlighting here how one could express a zeitgeist in an architecture configured by that very sense and modes of the time. Viollet-le-Duc also warned against what he perceived as the evils of eclecticism though. Against what he saw as a wrongful understanding of the past, of one based on accumulative appropriation and not contemplative appreciation. Writing in *Entretiens* that:

Have we reached an incurable state of decline that we cannot hope to see architecture free itself from the rut in which it has been dragged along? Are we reduced to the necessity of copying the Romans, very badly –the Greeks...-the Middle Ages –the Renaissance – the age of Louis XIV....because we can do no better?...What some have called Eclecticism in art, -the adaptation of elements derived from various quarters to the composition of new art, -is, in every respect, barbarism.<sup>45</sup>

It is here clear that Viollet-le-Duc here encouraged each age to strive to find its own form and that form to be decided by the demands of the structure. At this moment one may also introduce Semper who also thought in accordance with those lines. Semper in contrast to for example Ruskin believed in the new possibilities of the industrial age, and did not share Ruskin's fear of the possible disintegration of the traditional art types. He believed that it was exactly the new possibilities that arose from industrial production that would aid architecture out from a practice of copying and imitating. This could then bring about a new "style" of building: "Style, means giving emphasis and artistic significance to the basic idea and to all intrinsic and extrinsic coefficients that modify the embodiment of the thee in a work of art."<sup>46</sup> Where the intrinsic and extrinsic coefficients are the variables which determine the result and the presentation. The intrinsic would here entail the material and techniques used in the production, and the extrinsic would be the "local, temporal, national, and personal factors affecting the work."<sup>47</sup> This is a situation where, as in Viollet-le-Duc, form is decided by the preconditions of form. In both these instances then, in Viollet-le-Duc and in Semper, one may

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<sup>44</sup> Henry van Brunt as cited in Daniel D. Reiff op.cit. p. 40

<sup>45</sup> Viollet-le-Duc from *Entretiens sur l'architecture*, as cited in: Daniel D. Reiff op.cit. pp. 43-44

<sup>46</sup> Gottfried Semper, *Science, Industry and Art*, as cited in: Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Architectural Theory, A Historical Survey 1673-1968*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) p. 135

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

trace common concepts which were invaluable to many members of the Chicago school (Jenney, Sullivan and Root in particular) when it came to the forming of their tenets and their execution. They laid the foundations on which the Chicagoans could build confidently.

## Easterners

On the “older” Atlantic shores of the east the vogue was slightly different. Although the commercial and public architecture here too was imbued by notions of practicality and verticality the style and influences were often different. Certainly Viollet-le-Duc and Semper had an impact here as well, one need only look at the author of the mentioned translation of *Entretiens* to underline this, but Van Brunt and others often took their teachings in another direction. In the same pre-mentioned introduction to *Discourses* Van Brunt would also write that: “We American occupy a new country, having no inheritance of ruins...All the past is ours.” His intended meaning here not a new and original architecture, but that Americans were free to choose from history’s vast repertoire. That while barbarian architecture might be “original and independent and consequently simple” a civilized country’s must be “retrospective, naturally turning to tradition and precedent, and therefore complex.”<sup>48</sup>

Eclecticism then, the freedom to choose an individual style for an individual project, was to be the eastern answer to the questions of historical appreciation and structural rationalism. In practice this would often mean beaux-arts or neo-gothic for office buildings and other high-rises, renaissance for commercial public buildings and beaux-arts for monumental public

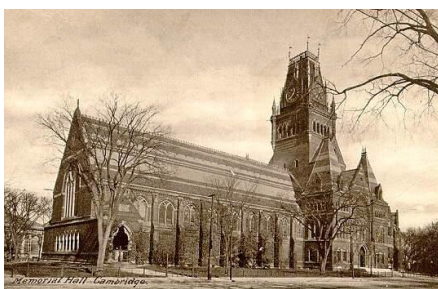


Figure 7.  
Memorial Hall at Harvard University  
Van Brunt & Ware, Completed 1877

works. Architects such as Henry Hobson Richardson, Henry van Brunt, George Post, McKim, Mead and White, Richard Morris Hunt and Peabody and Stearns may in varying degrees be included into this eastern tradition.<sup>49</sup> Richardson serves here as an elder statesman if you will, as an influence on all who worked in the field in the latter half of the century. Within architecture one might call him the father of the American Renaissance

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<sup>48</sup> Henry van Brunt as cited in: Richard Guy Wilson, “Architecture and the Reinterpretation of the Past in the American Renaissance,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Spring, 1983) pp. 75-76

<sup>49</sup> Henry-Russell Hitchcock, op. cit. pp. 311-323, 335-336



Figure 8.  
West Academic Building  
Richard Morris Hunt, Completed 1895



Figure 9.  
Marshall Field's Wholesale Store  
Henry Hobson Richardson, Completed 1887



Figure 10.  
Boston Public Library  
McKim, Mead & White, Completed 1895

because of his strict adherence to romanesque and renaissance principles. Although a student of the *École* he was to be more influenced by the teachings of John Ruskin who stressed the importance of organic materials and craftsmanship and the truth in facades, i.e. no industrial elements or hidden structural realities. Another important figure was Richard Morris Hunt who was the first American trained at the *École*<sup>50</sup> and one of its strongest benefactors in the nation. From the offices of these two would later come architects such as Charles Follen McKim and Stanford White from Richardson's apprenticeship and George B. Post and Henry Van Brunt of Hunt's. Of these McKim attended the *École*, as did Robert Swain Peabody of Peabody and Stearns. Notwithstanding influence from Ruskin and other neo-gothic promoters, which one may for example see in Van Brunt and Ware's Memorial Hall at Harvard University (fig. 7) and the later West Academic Building at The United States Military Academy (fig. 8) by Richard Morris Hunt, the most important influences on many eastern architects would be the classical and the renaissance, as we will see in the design of "White City." This preoccupation one may by and large trace back two decades from the time of the fair and being at its height in the 1890's. Starting with Richardson, which one may see in his Marshall Field's Wholesale Store (fig. 9) and continued by others such as in Peabody and Stearns' R.H. White Warehouse Store and later by McKim, Mead and White in their design for the Boston Public Library (fig. 10) the renaissance would have a continued hold over architecture in America for over half a century. Richardson would not employ pure renaissance revival elements, but had a penchant for the romanesque with its solid walls and semi-circular arches, but as the sway of the *École* grew larger so would the import of renaissance and beaux-arts styles. The more classical Italianate renaissance was, as in the

<sup>50</sup> *École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts* in Paris from which the architectural style takes its name.



Figure 11.  
New York World Building  
George B. Post, Completed 1890

mentioned example, often the favored mode early on, and recognizable by its use of the high renaissance palazzo style construction. Here one may observe the strict devotion to the classical rules of scale and proportion, executed through the arrangement of the pilaster, column, arch, arcade, wall, window, frame, atrium, cornice and attic. Where the window was essential, each ranged upon each other in rows, with “each treated as a separate feature and accentuated by pediment, pilasters, or columns yet rhythmically articulated to one another.”<sup>51</sup> Here the structure is solid, not cut off from the street, but opened up by its repeated fenestration;

framed, held up and embellished by its load bearing elements above and between and often topped off by an attica and balustrade. The reasons for the popularity of this style are in Richard Guy Morris’ view threefold: It is the genteel tradition of the American bourgeoisie of viewing art as civilizing. It is the cosmopolitan view; of America as not being less than others and of the hope to incorporate and eventually surpass Europe. And it is the search for a national identity and style.<sup>52</sup> The renaissance ticked all the boxes in these categories. Through architecture in particular one may grasp the “operative myth of the American renaissance,”<sup>53</sup> as an attempt to achieve the goals of the mentioned categories. The beaux-arts style was also an utterance of this, a continuation of the classical within a “modern” often Frenchified context, as in Post’s design for the New York World building (fig. 11). For Van Brunt, and many of his contemporaries, then it was no longer a case of “all the past is ours,” neither could one go it alone, to cut oneself off and be independent, that would be tantamount to barbarism and result in the facile. To progress one had to embrace what was seen as the pinnacles of the past achievements and in that way be a continuation of it. This was for van Brunt “the chosen language in which the greatest architects and most advanced societies of the human race have expressed themselves” and to deploy it would give “the modern architect...all the majesty of authority and all the imposing beauty of a perfected language of form.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Sigfried Giedion, op. cit. p. 56

<sup>52</sup> Richard Guy Wilson, op. cit. pp. 73-75

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* p. 70

<sup>54</sup> Henry van Brunt as cited in: Richard Guy Wilson, op. cit. pp. 81 and 85

The architects mentioned here are not coincidental, most where at the time at the height of their careers, and genuinely occupied by the course and character of their country as well as their own practices. When it came to displaying their nation to the world they would be the ones called upon, perhaps differing in their ideals, but joined by their felt sense of responsibility and above all opportunity.

### **“Battle of the talkers”<sup>55</sup>**

We arrive at the eve then of the competition to hold the next world’s fair in America. Momentum had gathered in the early 1880’s to the cause of holding a world’s fair, or universal exposition, to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus’ discovery of the new world. Later in the decade cities started to jostle for position and by the turn of the decade four cities had announced their candidature. They were: New York, St. Louis, Washington D.C. and Chicago. It would soon become clear that it would fall to Congress to decide upon the winner and the right to hold the exposition, and by means of their size and ability to attract financial backing it became apparent that this would be a two horse race between the “old” metropolis of New York against the new pretender of Chicago. In July of 1889 an organization was formed of the city’s professional, political, financial and business elite to the purpose of bringing the exposition to Chicago. The city council itself got involved later in the same month, with the mayor DeWitt C. Cregier, given the authority to organize a committee to head the bid. Here an executive committee was summarily chosen to set the foundations of a corporation responsible to facilitate fundraising and practical implementation of the process, to decision Thomas B. Bryan, one of its leaders exclaimed: “The men who have helped build Chicago want the fair, and having a just and well-sustained claim, they intend to have it.”<sup>56</sup> It was decided that the corporation should raise a guarantee fund of no less than 5 million dollars which would be obtained through the sale of stocks for a price of 10 \$ each. Progress was good, but slow, with millionaires and workingmen alike buying shares out of civic pride and duty, but first and foremost out of the opportunity of profit. The 5 million was reached after various drives such as for example designated share buying days, only to realize that this would not be enough, especially compared to New York’s pledge of 10 million, which would

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<sup>55</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, February 21st (p. 1, cols. 7 ff.) 1890 cited in: Francis L. Lederer II, “Competition for the World’s Columbian Exposition: The Chicago Campaign,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1908-1984). Vol. 65, No. 4 (Winter, 1972), p. 383

<sup>56</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, August 2, 1889, p. 1, cols. 1 ff. as cited in: Francis L. Lederer II, op. cit. p. 383

later rise to 15 million. Another 5 million of bonds were then issued in January 1890, taking Chicago's funds up to 10 million,<sup>57</sup> just in time for hearings in Congress after the Christmas recess.

Even with their financial advantage, the New York bid was not without its challenges. Divisions between factions in the city itself and between the campaign leadership and the state legislature in Albany had severely hampered preparations before their time on the floor in Congress. New York City was run by the Democratic Party and by the political machine of Tammany Hall, but New York State on the other hand was in Republican control, hence a Republican, Chancey Depew, was appointed by New York City Mayor Hugh J. Grant to head the campaign committee as to garner support from the state capitol of Albany and the largely republican controlled eastern neighbors of New England. Republican State leader Thomas C. Platt would not endorse the a campaign bill for support of the bid put forward to the State Senate because of disagreements over the Board of Commissioners' membership roster. Platt was of the opinion that it did not contain enough "true" Republicans and that control of the exposition and specifically its finances would fall to Tammany Hall. The disagreement was not resolved until February the 29<sup>th</sup> of 1890, by a compromise devised to limit the Board of Commissioners' power, only four days before the final vote in Congress.

The speeches on behalf of the different competing cities were characterized by boastful claims of the respective cities unique suitability to host the exposition. Bryan of Chicago would hail its "abundant supplies of good air and pure water,...ample space, accommodations and transportation for all exhibits and visitors, together with convenient access to the greatest number."<sup>58</sup> And when speaking of this "greatest number" Bryan here meant Americans, the claim being that a fair in Chicago would truly be an American event, and that one held in New York would be "foreign." New York supporter William Waldorf Astor on the other hand pointed exactly to this international outlook as an asset when stating that "...if the fair was held in Chicago, it would be an agricultural show rather than a true international exposition...In New York...We aim to make it an historic exemplar of the last four centuries – to illustrate what has been achieved in civilization since the discovery of America." The

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<sup>57</sup> Francis L. Lederer II, op. cit. p. 387

<sup>58</sup> As cited in: Francis L. Lederer II, op. cit. p. 389

place to do this was obvious for Astor, for him Chicago was but “an inland and prosaic city”<sup>59</sup> After the initial hearings a Committee on the World’s fair was formed to articulate legislation and prepare a report of advice on the selection of a host city, the name of the host city was left blank in the bill and February 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> were set for debate on the issue and the 24<sup>th</sup> set aside for voting. The cities were again given the chance to advance their cause on the floor in the House, where one according to the *Chicago Tribune* could witness once again an “uninterrupted flow of oratory about the greatness of our country, and especially of the importance of each of the four competing cities” in this “battle of the talkers.”<sup>60</sup> When the actual vote finally took place on February 24<sup>th</sup> 1890 it required eight ballots to declare a winner, but on the eighth it was over; Chicago had won with 157 votes, New York got 107, St. Louis 26 and Washington 18. When victory was at hand William Fitzgerald of Chicago walked over to Depew and fellow New Yorker William Collins Whitney and declared “Boys, we have got you.”<sup>61</sup> The Senate approved of the choice of the House and the World’s Fair Bill of 1890 declaring Chicago the exposition site was signed into law by President Benjamin Harrison on April 25<sup>th</sup>. Chicago had won the competition and, at least felt by many of its protagonists, approval to represent the country in its image. But as we shall see, things were not so straightforward, with many compromises having to be made and special attention needed to nurture the bruised ego of New York. As much as they might have liked to, this was no time for Chicago to gloat.

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<sup>59</sup> As cited in: Robert D. Parmet, “Competition for the World’s Columbian Exposition: The New York Campaign,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)*. Vol. 65, No. 4 (Winter, 1972), p. 369

<sup>60</sup> As cited in: Francis L. Lederer II, op. cit. p. 392

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* p. 380



## 2.

The following chapter will attempt to chart the developments coming after Chicago bested New York to gain the right to stage the World's Columbian Exposition. It will trace the planning process of the endeavour and the decisions made concerning organization, location and design. In doing so the role of Daniel H. Burnham, and his partnership with John W. Root, will be examined in relation to their roles as consulting architects, and Burnham's later offices as the Chief of Construction and Director of Works. Further the text will try to outline the procedure used in the selection of architects and the possible reasons for choosing a classical style of architecture. This will be done in light of the view often voiced after the exposition, that the choices made were mistaken ones and merely the will of a few.

### Enter Burnham



Figure 12.  
Daniel Burnham, 1891

Much has been written about the role of Daniel Hudson Burnham in the planning and eventual execution of buildings for the exposition, about the selection of architects and the ultimate displays of style. Who was this man, and what was his part in it all? Daniel Hudson Burnham, who was to become the former in Burnham & Root, architects of for example the previously mentioned Monadnock and Reliance buildings, was born in 1846. He was an apprentice in the office of Jenney and gained his first employment as a draftsman for architects Carter, Drake and Wight. Here he met John Wellborn Root with whom he would set up a partnership and own firm in 1873. By the end of the 1870's they were an established business in the city of Chicago. When the planning for the Columbian exposition was in its infancy in 1890, Burnham & Root had become one of the most respected architectural names in Chicago and the wider region. Their selection as consulting architects for the exposition came as an effect of their reputation in the Chicago business community as co-operative, practical and result oriented, without compromising quality. Their partnership and success was based on a collaborative approach, which would be reflected in their given roles within the undertaking, with Burnham as the public relations, administrative and executive mind and Root as the perfectionist and master draftsman. In practice their method would often be of Burnham as sketching the general

outlines and floor plans of buildings and Root as perfecting the details and ornamental aspects. Burnham as the planner and Root as the artist. Harriet Monroe, Root's biographer, would write that: "Burnham was skillful in laying out a building... When a building came to the office, Mr. Burnham, as a rule, laid out more or less roughly ground and floor plans... the partners deciding together upon the best one, which Root would use as the first element of his problem in designing the exterior."<sup>62</sup> Louis Sullivan, later one of Burnham's harshest critics, wrote in his autobiography of 1924 about the partnership that: "...[Root] had not one-tenth of his partner's settled will, nor of said partner's capacity to go through hell to reach an end."<sup>63</sup> Thomas Hines wrote about the two in his biography on Burnham that:

While Burnham's practical contributions to conception and design were important, Root's work was paramount in creating the ultimate artistic form. Often following Burnham's initial suggestions as to general visual configuration an over-all room arrangement, Root perfected the spatial relations and proportions, harmonized the plan to materials and site, and in his modulation of line, color, texture, and ornament, gave the building its ultimate architectural personality.<sup>64</sup>

The partners then, as the story goes, balanced each other, letting one another's talents thrive where best served.

In the decades after his death in 1912, and especially after the fading of the City Beautiful movement in the 1920's, Burnham and the World's Columbian Exposition received harsh criticism. One here got the idea of "the Lost Cause," the perception that what unfolded at the exposition grounds in Jackson park was a betrayal against a burgeoning distinct American style of architecture and the ensuing City Beautiful movement the death knell to the subsistency of such a style. Louis Sullivan (himself a participant at the exposition as we shall see) was in many respects the instigator of the conception of the "Lost Cause." Writing his memoirs of sorts in 1922, shortly before his death, Sullivan would "prophesize" in hindsight in the last chapter of his *Autobiography of an Idea* about the errors of the exposition, stating for example about the architectural program that it was as a: "white shadow cast by a white

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<sup>62</sup> Harriet Monroe as cited in: Thomas S. Hines, *Burnham of Chicago*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974) p. 22

<sup>63</sup> Louis Sullivan as cited in: *ibid.* p. 24

<sup>64</sup> Thomas S. Hines, *op. cit.* p. 25

cloud borne upon winds of predestination which blew from the east,”<sup>65</sup> and about its effect that: “The damage wrought by the World's Fair will last for half a century from its date, if not longer. It has penetrated deep into the constitution of the American mind, effecting there lesions significant of dementia.”<sup>66</sup> These thoughts would be embraced by the functionalists of the 1930's and carried far into post World War Two America by architectural historians and critics such as for example the already cited Sigfried Giedion. What then could have been so atrocious to destroy, or hinder, decades of architectural evolution, and was really Burnham to blame for it all? Or is reality more aligned with Joan E. Draper's 1989 introduction to Burnham's *Final Report*, stating that:

His bitter statement [Sullivan's] – written thirty years after the fact to explain his failed career – was taken literally by his admirers. Following his lead, many critics and historians proclaimed that architect Daniel Burnham, Director of Works and chief of the design team, was a villain, the Exposition his crime. Burnham was further depicted as a fraud who sold out Chicago's esthetic future to plutocratic business interest when he awarded Eastern architects the commissions for the Court of Honor, including the most prominent Fair buildings.<sup>67</sup>

Although this statement ignores that the very same criticism had also been raised at the time and in the fair's aftermath, particularly from circles in Europe<sup>68</sup> it is indicative of dichotomous views held of the fair and its participants, specifically in an American context, of either Burnham as a sellout or Sullivan just harboring sour grapes. The mentioned Court of Honor was the exposition's centerpiece and the focal point of the main exhibition halls which combined would come to be known as “White City,” Sullivan's “white cloud.” The style and architecture of these elements will be dealt with in detail at a later stage, suffice to say here that what was eventually deployed was a grandiose gathering of buildings in a neo-classical style, covered in an artificial material called staff and modeled into shapes reminiscent of Rome and the renaissance, and painted in a uniform shade of white, hence the name White City. The coming chapter will deal with the questions of how these results came about,

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<sup>65</sup> Louis Sullivan as cited in: Titus M. Karlowicz, “D. H. Burnham's Role in the Selection of Architects for the World's Columbian Exposition,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Oct., 1970) p. 247

<sup>66</sup> Louis Sullivan as cited in: David H. Crook, “Louis Sullivan and the Golden Doorway,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Dec., 1967) p. 250

<sup>67</sup> Joan E. Draper, “Introduction,” p. x, in: Daniel H. Burnham, op.cit.

<sup>68</sup> See for example Arnold Lewis' *An early encounter with tomorrow, Europeans, Chicago's Loop and The World's Columbian Exposition*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997)

Burnham, as Sullivan's culprit, role in it all and his abettors to the alleged architectural crime. But first, let us look at some features of the preparation in its early stages.

### **Planning for the exposition**

In the intervening time, between the two acts of Congress, Chicago was already busy at work for the organization of the exposition. A meeting of the shareholders was held on April 10<sup>th</sup> 1890, where a board of 45 directors was chosen. The new board of the company of "The World's Exposition of 1892" (Later changed to the "The World's Columbian Exposition") met on April 12<sup>th</sup> where they elected a president which in turn selected the various executive committees and their composition. A total of nine committees were created, of which the Committee on grounds and buildings in many aspects was the most important one, dealing with as it was the most visible and basic features of the exposition, on which almost everything else was subsistent. Soon it became apparent, as Harlow N. Higinbotham writes in his *Report of the President to the Board of Directors*<sup>69</sup> that: "A working staff of experts became necessary for properly carrying on the work of the Committee on Grounds and Buildings, and this committee, under authority from the Board, appointed F. L. Olmsted & Co. consulting landscape architects, Abram Gottlieb consulting engineer, and Burnham & Root consulting architects." The first order of business for the committee and its consultants was to come to a final decision on a site for the exposition, and get it approved by Congress' World's Columbian Commission which had the final say in the matter according to the bill of April 25<sup>th</sup>. The sites that were discussed were: The Lake Front, Lake View on the North Side, Washington Park and the Midway Plaisance, Washington and Jackson Parks and the Midway Plaisance.<sup>70</sup> Of these sites the most seriously entertained were the Lake Front and the Southern Park System of Washington, Jackson and the Midway Plaisance. Because of its central location, the Lake Front was here the early frontrunner, situated as it was more or less between the Loop and Lake Michigan. (Where one today finds Millennium Park, with the Art Institute, and Grant Park.) At this time this was a largely undeveloped area lying between Michigan Avenue and the tracks of the Michigan Central Railway which was built up on piles some distance from the shoreline. About half of the area had been filled in and designated for

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<sup>69</sup> H. N. Higinbotham, *Report of the President to the Board of Directors of the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1898) p. 21-22

<sup>70</sup> Daniel H. Burnham, *The Final Official Report of the Director of Works of the World's Columbian Exposition*, June 1894 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989) Vol.1 p. 33



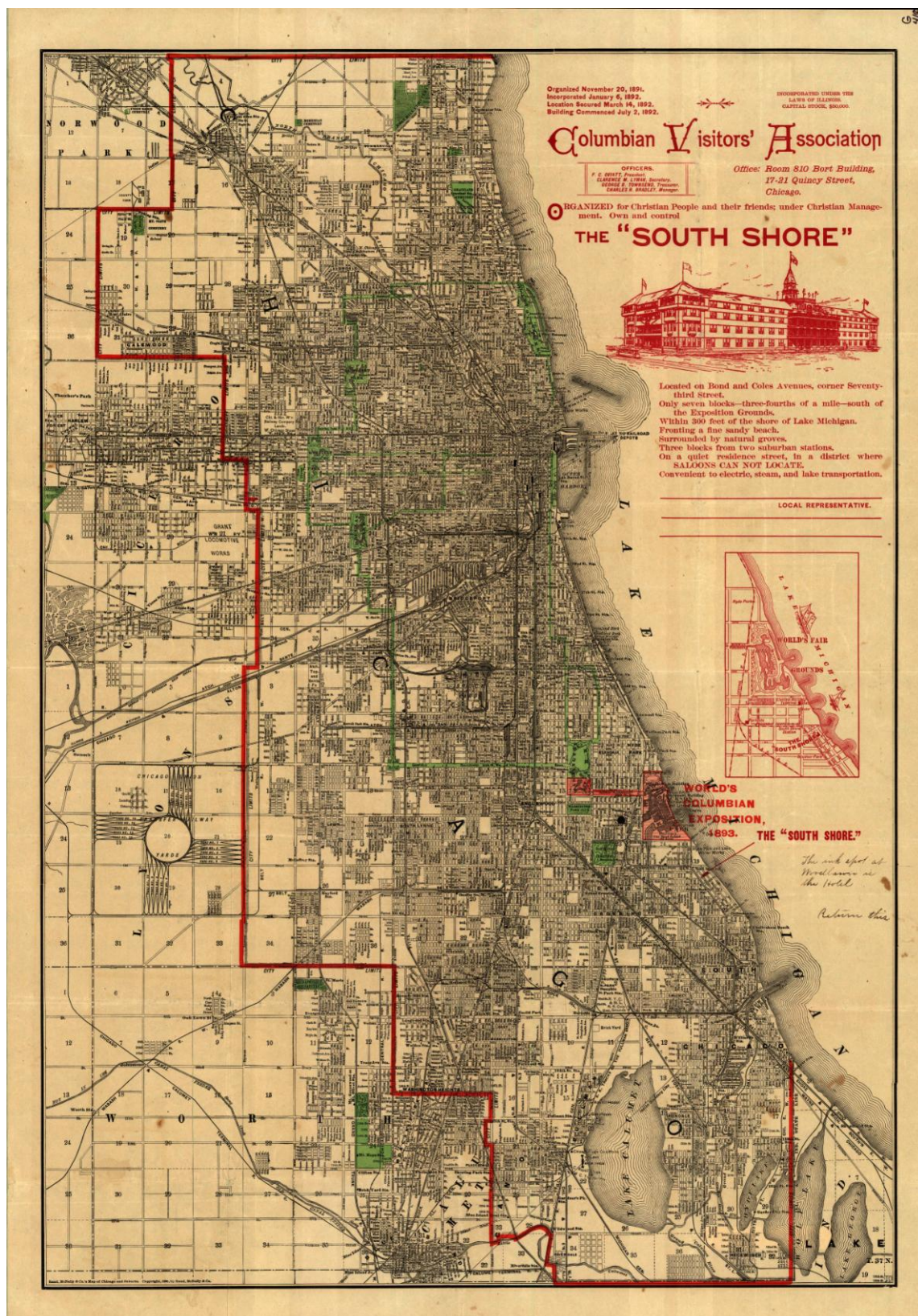


Figure. 13.  
Chicago 1893, with parks in green and Jackson park, Midway Plaisance and Washington park in red.

park purposes, but the rest lay more or less barren, waterlogged or submerged entirely. Nevertheless, because of its amiable location, this choice was the early favoured, with Higinbotham stating that:

Its friends were willing to attack grave difficulties, for the plan offered many attractions for the Exposition, with permanent resulting benefits to the city. Had it been possible to locate the entire Exposition at the Lake Front, the comfort of a large proportion of the visitors, who would have been saved much travel, and the permanent benefit to the city derived from the location of a magnificent park close to the heart of the business district, would have been advantages worthy of great sacrifices.<sup>71</sup>

Even with large scale improvements and land reclamation though, the area proved too small, measuring a maximum of 200 to 300 acres. The amount set to be sufficient for the lofty aims of the exposition was in excess of 400 acres. The thoughts then turned towards the possibility of a dual site solution. One imagined that in such a scheme one could place the most important structures at the Lake Front site and the rest at another, most likely Jackson Park as it too was situated by the lake only further south. This solution however, did not prove altogether convincing to any party, it was not popular in the National Commission who feared its effect on foreign visitors compared to that of past single site fairs, nor was it well received from the property owners on Michigan Avenue. Perhaps most importantly it was not approved of by the consultants of Burnham & Root and Olmsted. Frederick Law Olmsted had risen to prominence in the 1860s and 70s for his design and work on New York's Central Park and Prospect Park with his longtime collaborator Calvert Vaux. Olmsted was here at the very peak of his powers, enjoying immense respect. His work and service to the exposition will not be dealt with in depth here, as he was not integral to the architectural scheme, but as an important voice of the times and being credited as one of the most important figures in the evolution of park and urban planning in America, he deserves mention, especially for his thoughts on landscapes as integrated urban planning. As evident by this quote by historian William H. Wilson: "Olmsted made three fundamental contributions...First, he moved from the designing of single, although multifunctional, parks to the planning of comprehensive, multiple-purpose Park and boulevard systems. Olmsted's systems became increasingly varied internally, while they interacted with the city's inhabitants and its other systems."<sup>72</sup> Such a cohesion of purpose and interaction with the city and the visitors, as Olmsted strove for, could not be possible with

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<sup>71</sup> H. N. Higinbotham, op. cit. p. 20

<sup>72</sup> William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) p. 10

a dual site solution. In his survey of Jackson Park and its surrounding area of August 12<sup>th</sup> 1890, Olmsted concluded that:

Taking out the required interspaces and decorated margins, it may be assumed that the buildings may be placed in Jackson Park...the temporary use thus to be made of the Park territory would not interfere with the carrying out of the original design of the park...The building sites provided for in this scheme would be adapted only to such buildings as would be removed at the close of the exposition. They would be satisfactory sites for hall for machinery, for railroad, electric and mining exhibits and for such objects as is generally included in what is called the main exhibition buildings.<sup>73</sup>

Burnham in his own hand followed up with: "...long before the National Commissioners and the Directors united on a site, it became evident to the Chief of Construction and his associates that Jackson Park ought to be chosen."<sup>74</sup> By "the Chief of Construction" Burnham refers to himself, being that this soon after became his title. The aim of this outline of "Plans and Specifications" was to move forward the decision on a site. A specified plan of buildings and layout was demanded by the National Commission before it would approve a site and extend invitations to foreign nations for participation.<sup>75</sup>

### **"The plan"**

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of November the consulting associates laid before the Committee on Grounds and Buildings (and later the Board of Directors and the National Commission) the plan of specifications and design, what would later be known simply as "the plan".<sup>76</sup> The plan sketches the contours of the exposition grounds and its general layout, including the facets and placements of a grand court with a central basin, a great obtruding pier into the lake, an inland lagoon north of the main court with a wooded island and surrounding structures of horticulture, fisheries and governments buildings. (See attached map.<sup>77</sup>) What is immediately noteworthy about the "plan" though, is its conspicuous lack of actual detailed plans. If one compares it with its counterpart worked out for the exposition in Paris in 1889, it is very brief and basic. As the authors of the plan themselves point out: "...the period of one year was

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<sup>73</sup> Frederick Law Olmstead as cited in Daniel H. Burnham op. cit. p. 34

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> H. N. Higinbotham, op. cit. p. 25

<sup>76</sup> For "the plan" in full, please see attachment 1. pp. 108-110

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

given to the designers [for developing the plan] with a large, well organized, disciplined and accomplished staff of assistants, to prepare...that work.”<sup>78</sup> This document was drawn up in less than 24 hours by the associate consultants of F. L. Olmsted & Co. Burnham & Root and Gottlieb. The authors also specify that the name “plans and specifications” cannot then be taken literally, but should be regarded more as a general outline. The document’s crude character then is not problematic as it is clearly pointed out and commented on by its creators. What is potentially problematic is that no later comprehensive detailed document of the same nature was ever presented and approved by the prementioned authorities. The reasons for this are as follows: The document outlines no specific architectural style, or styles, to be employed at the exposition, and neither does it clarify the numbers and sizes of the buildings to be erected. When it comes to the appearance of the inhabiting buildings the plan only offers a most general outline in for example stating that: “The buildings will be impressive in appearance,” that the Horticulture building will be “largely of iron and glass,” that the Agriculture building should be “interesting in plan and appearance,” the Fisheries building should be “as beautiful as possible,” that the Administration building should be “well constructed and of fire proof material” and that it together with “...the Machinery, the Manufactures, the Mines and the Electricity, are to form a whole in design.” And that:

...they are intended as a mass to be impressive; as a plan most convenient; and as structures to be very substantial. The materials entering into their composition will be largely iron and masonry of brick and stone, though free use will be made of terra cotta, wood, staff and other materials.<sup>79</sup>

The authors may be forgiven the gross generalizations used, the time allotted them could not make it otherwise, but what then simultaneously occurs; by the acceptance of this plan with its title being “plans and specifications,” the plan itself being exactly without specifications, and by the subsequent creation of the Department of Construction to head and facilitate the ensuing work,<sup>80</sup> is a de facto granting of all executive power to this department when it comes

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<sup>78</sup> Daniel H. Burnham op. cit. p. 35

<sup>79</sup> ibid. p. 36

<sup>80</sup> In *The Report of the President* it is stated that: “In order to perfect the organization necessary for the great work of construction, radical changes were made in the staff of the Committee on Grounds and Buildings. By the authority of the Board of Directors, the committee created a Construction Department, and appointed Daniel H. Burnham, of the firm of Burnham & Root, chief of construction. His partner, John W. Root, became architect ; Abram Gottlieb, engineer, and Olmsted & Co., landscape architects, all attached to the Construction Department.” H. N. Higinbotham, op. cit. p. 28



to the concrete composition and style of the exposition halls. Burnham assumed the role of lead architect after the untimely death of John W. Root from pneumonia on January 15<sup>th</sup> 1891 at only the age of 41, and was also given the task of selecting the architects for the various buildings, who would also constitute the commission of architects responsible for artistic expression. A virtual blank cheque then to Burnham and his chosen cohorts? Whatever the case, they would all take to their jobs with utmost seriousness, and even with the freedoms given felt the burden great, as we shall see in the coming parts.

### **The Chief, the Director and his architects**

When Root died, Burnham as already Chief of Construction, also assumed the duties of Chief Architect. He would not only be responsible for planning, layout and the actual work carried out to erect the structures in Jackson Park, but would also take upon himself the authority of design. Incorporating in his person the entire capacities of the Burnham & Root partnership. Naturally though the work at hand was much too great for a single architect and it was decided that due to limitations of time, the efforts would have to be divided and accumulated to finish the goals set before the deadline.<sup>81</sup> The Department of Construction thus drew up a memorandum concerning the different methods which could be used to select architects to be given commissions. Higinbotham writes that:

The Committee on Grounds and Buildings considered three methods of procedure:

*First.* That of inviting unlimited competition from those who might desire to submit plans for buildings.

*Second.* A limited competition among a number of architects to be selected by the committee.

*Third.* The selection of a few leading architects to constitute a Board of Consulting Architects, acting in harmony, apportioning out the work among its members, and consulting at various stages until the plans were perfected.<sup>82</sup>

In Burnham's *Final Report*, with the memorandum re-printed, one may read an additional alternative as number one, being: "The selection of one man to whom the designing of the

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<sup>81</sup> The goals, in terms of buildings and mass, being vaguely defined as surpassing the Paris 1889 expo. With Mr, Jeffrey, the Chairman of the Grounds and Buildings Committee stating that "they ought to cover about one-third more are than those of the Paris Exposition of 1889." Daniel H. Burnham, op. cit. p. 34.

And the exposition itself moved to 1893 rather than the initial 1892 which would have been the intended quadricentennial of Columbus' voyage.

<sup>82</sup> H. N. Higinbotham, op. cit. p. 28

entire work should be entrusted,” and the last alternative, here number four, reads: “Direct selection.” The first three alternatives are debunked by Burnham on the grounds of time limitation, and the last one recommended, and hence adopted by the Committee. In the business model on which the enterprise was set up, as a vertically integrated body, with one head when it came to applied matters, this would mean selection by Burnham as his job description was: “...to select, organize and control all forces needed to produce and operate the Exposition.”<sup>83</sup> Added to his would later also be Root’s role to: “...formulate...[a] scheme for an architectural corps.”<sup>84</sup> Before his death, Root, who in his biographer Harriet Monroe’s words was: “...possessed by visions of beauty,”<sup>85</sup> had already himself worked emphatically on sketches and proposals for the different sites and their prospective buildings, especially the Jackson park idea, which he favoured. Monroe writes that as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> of September Root had laid out the principles of the later adopted “plan”, corresponding with his wife that: “Last night I laid out Jackson Park in a preliminary way, making large use of the lake and of interior lagoons, etc.; and I am satisfied that there can be obtained a most picturesque and novel effect – barges, gondolas, flags, and flutter, and “all such.”” She further quotes Owen F. Aldis of the Grounds and Buildings Committee: “Before he presented it to the committee, he brought me the sheet of brown paper...he pointed out the lagoons, and the island, the locations of buildings, the axes of groups – all the essential features of the final plan.”<sup>86</sup> On the basis of Root’s layout, the architects would be invited under the pretenses of the fourth alternative which reads as follows:

4<sup>th</sup>. This is to select a certain number of architects, choosing each man for such work as would be most nearly parallel with his best achievements; these architects to meet in conference, and become masters of all the elements of the problems to be solved, and agree upon some general scheme of procedure.

The preliminary studies resulting from this to be compared and freely discussed in a subsequent conference, and, with the assistance of such suggestions as your advisers might make, to be brought into a harmonious whole.

The honor conferred upon those selected would create in their minds a disposition to place the artistic quality of their work in advance of the mere question of emoluments; while the emulation begotten in a

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<sup>83</sup> Daniel H. Burnham, op. cit. p. 5

<sup>84</sup> Harriet Monroe, *John Wellborn Root; A study of his life and work*, (Cambridge U.S.: The Riverside Company, 1896) p. 236

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* p. 218

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* p. 222

rivalry so dignified and friendly could not fail to be productive of a result which would stand before the world as the best fruit of American civilization.<sup>87</sup>

From these guidelines one may surmise three facets: *First*. That because the design of the Court of Honor was already thought of as a whole, its style would largely be determined by the selected architects' portfolios since the idea was to choose "each man for such work as would be most nearly parallel with his best achievements." As Korlowicz argues in his article on the issue, that, as time was essential, those selected to carry out this group, had been selected partly because they knew and respected each other, thus reducing the risk of conflict.<sup>88</sup> *Second*. That the individual architects given commissions would not be free to design solely to their own inclinations, but subjected to the "suggestions" of the corporations advisors, i.e. Burnham and the Committee on Grounds and Buildings, and its qualities to fit with the "harmonious whole." *Third*. That the style of architecture chosen to be on display should be representative of the whole of America and done in such a way as to show the world the progress and refinement of its civilization. Five architects were then nominated by Burnham, confirmed by the committee and invited. They were as follows:

Richard M. Hunt of New York

McKim, Mead & White of New York

George B. Post of New York

Peabody & Stearns of Boston

Van Brunt & Howe of Kansas City

### **A question of civilization**

There are no sources stating exactly why these names were chosen by Burnham, other than their contemporary reputations as mentioned and the points listed above, but it is possible to discern the conceivable reasons by looking at the contemporary public debate and the general thoughts on exhibition architecture at the time. When Chicago was awarded the exposition in early 1890 the immediate thoughts went to how it could rival Paris of 1889. The *Exposition universelle* there had attracted 32 million visitors in the lure of such industrial wonders as the Galerie des machines and the Eiffel tower. Chicago one assumed, would have to be bigger

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<sup>87</sup> Daniel H. Burnham, op. cit. p. 6

<sup>88</sup> Titus M. Karlowicz, op. cit. p. 254

and better. Tower fever promptly commenced in the media and architectural circles of Chicago. Many ideas and sketches for colossal tower projects were put forth and illustrated in the Chicago Tribune such as W.L. Judson's round tower in the shape of a lighthouse where people could drive cars in circles on their way to the top platform, designed as a gigantic Bramantic tempietto. And naturally the tower would be as wide as the Eiffel at its base and about 600 feet taller. Other suggestions included many copies of the Eiffel, save larger, as for example George S. Morison's, and adaptations of the Eiffel such as Timothy Barnard Powers' pivoting tower and Kinkel and Pohl's iron tower in a gothic cocoon. Even Eiffel himself offered to build a new tower twice the size of his original. There were also more unorthodox proposals such as F. Ingoldsby "Freedom Raising the World," a massive exhibition hall covered by an enormous American Atlas with the world on his shoulders. None however caught the imagination quite such as E.S. Jenison's proposal for a tower that would simultaneously act as a gigantic exhibition hall. Essentially the plan was for a massive pyramidal tent of steel and glass with a central tower like core, topped off with spire and viewing platform. This, the architect argued, would give about 194 acres of exhibition space; the ground floor would be 162 acres and the galleries above a combined 32 acres. The whole exposition could be under one roof and still be twice the size of the Parisian one. International response to Jenison's proposal was favorable, but eastern critics were not so positive. Still bitter from their loss to Chicago, they feared that such a structure could never be built in the time frame given, at this time one remembers, discussions were still feisty over the selection of site and progress on the Exposition was slow. The East (New York in particular) feared that Chicago would blemish the whole country, the city they thought;

...was still a provincial town...too parochial to represent the country with the class their city would have guaranteed. Newspapers in the East predicted Chicago's fair would be big, boorish, and unattractive to Europeans, who would not be interested in traveling great distances to see a vast cattle show.<sup>89</sup>

The idea here, that the reputation of the entire country was at stake, is a most important one. The concept of a Columbian Exposition was after all not a Chicagoan one, but an American one, and hence what was on to be on display was the civilization of the whole nation. The tone of eastern newspapers also mirrored this by shifting from pure derision in 1890 to one of

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<sup>89</sup> Arnold Lewis, op. cit. p. 172

unease in 1891, stating that: "...the failure of the fair or anything short of a positive and pronounced success would be a discredit to the whole country, and not to Chicago alone."<sup>90</sup> If Chicago might not be dependant on the east to pay for the exposition, it was surely dependant on it to be a success in terms of participating exhibitors and paying visitors. If one couple this with the fact that after all, even if Chicagoans surely liked to think otherwise, the highest authority and the official organizer of the exposition was in fact the National Commission and the federal state. This, one could expect, would have been made clear to the corporation, and also eventually to the professionals of Chicago as one may read in *The Inland Architect* issue of July 1890 under the headline "Mistaken idea that the Fair belongs to Chicago"<sup>91</sup> where the journal berates the individuals it feels holds up the planning process based on local interests. The journal had earlier directed the same criticism at the other competing cities and congressional members used it as an argument for having the exposition in Chicago, that no city could offer the national and American character as Chicago could.<sup>92</sup> All of this would surely have been on Burnham's mind when appointing the respective architects to design the most important buildings and serve on the Commission of Architects. The co-operation of the east was imperative for the exposition's success and the *raison d'être* for the exposition at all was from the start a national one.

The questions thus arise: What would an "American" exposition look like, which style(s) would best evoke a national character and why these five architects specifically? Most foreign commentators expected something spectacular. Rivaling Paris in substance they thought, would be impossible. Rather many believed that the Americans should experiment, the thoughts being that: "this was a temporary festival, new ideas should be set forth by novel methods, and in ways never yet attempted."<sup>93</sup> Most architects of the nation though, were of other sentiments, believing instead that what should be mirrored was the country's civilization, its cultural progress and character, not merely its engineering capacities. For this purpose, the *Inland Architect* proposed that:

...the general direction in design should be as little historical and as greatly illustrative of the present status of American architecture as possible. It might be said that three distinct styles have developed in

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<sup>90</sup> New York Times as cited in: Arnold Lewis, op. cit. p. 175

<sup>91</sup> *Inland Architect and News Record*, Vol. XV No. 6 (Jul., 1890) p. 81

<sup>92</sup> *Inland Architect and News Record*, Vol. XV No's. 2 and 3 (Mar., Apr., 1890)

<sup>93</sup> Arnold Lewis, op. cit. p. 168

the United States with sufficient distinctness to be generalized under the headings of Romanesque, Francis I, and Colonial...The entire idea being to show that we have a beginning, at least of an American style, and to show that style in its present highest development.

A structure like Jenison's, was out of the question then. In Monroe's biography on Root one may see several of the sketches made, before his decision to supervise rather than to design himself, of which all are in a Richardson Romanesque style.<sup>94</sup> But here one may also read of Root's general thoughts on exhibition architecture, and in the possibility of him designing the Art Department, stating that at last he might be able to design something of "beauty" and not only "commerce."<sup>95</sup> Along these lines were also the thoughts of Henry Van Brunt, one of the chosen five, of whom one may find answers to the first two questions as he wrote extensively on the subjects. He, as Root, thought that this was indeed the opportunity to design something truly beautiful and artistic and not just practicable to fit a purpose. But Van Brunt, and seemingly also the other four firms, were of the opinion that no American style truly existed, except perhaps the vernacular, which in no way was worthy of showing off the state of their civilization. "In fact," Van Brunt states in his essay "Growth of Architectural Style":

...it seems sufficiently evident that, as long as we remember the past and what has been accomplished by the masters of architecture in all the ages, there can never again grow a distinctive style in the sense of what we call Greek, Roman, Christian, Mohammedan or Renaissance; that there never again can come into existence a national style which shall keep strictly within any narrow bounds of architectural expression, excluding all others; but that all the historical demonstrations of art are necessary to constitute that larger and more copious language of form which is necessary to express in terms of art the rapid progress in the science of modern construction, and that many-sided and complicated civilization which it is the obvious destiny of our country to amalgamate, harmonize and justify out of all the civilizations of history.<sup>96</sup>

Van Brunt by no means advocates eclecticism here, but continues the points made by Richard Guy Morris mentioned earlier, that to express civilization one must evoke the highest ideals of past achievements. And when it came to a unified effort of structures in concert such as was intended with the Court of Honor, there was but one option in Van Brunt's mind, the classical.

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<sup>94</sup> Harriet Monroe, op. cit. pp. 216, 217 and 228

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.* p. 240

<sup>96</sup> Henry Van Brunt, "The Growth of Characteristic Architectural Style in the United States (1893) as printed in: *Architecture and Society, Selected Essays of Henry Van Brunt*, (Cambridge, Ma.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969) p. 327

The outline, made by Root, Burnham and Olmsted, Van Brunt posits: "...seemed to forbid the use of medieval or any other form of romantic, archæological [sic], or picturesque art. The style should be distinctly secular and pompous, restrained from licence by historical authority, and organized by academical discipline."<sup>97</sup> Van Brunt hence continues to say that he and the others then quickly agreed upon using Roman classic forms and their variations from the Renaissance. In response to ideas about showing some variations of "American Style" Van Brunt counters with stating that this might indeed have resulted in interesting creations, but merely that, novelties, nothing of unity or true art. It would in his words have been a "hazardous experiment" and it "seemed safer to proceed with established formulas." The goal of the whole scheme was to him not to show something of the now, but of what could be, through the employment of the best that had already been. The present conditions of architecture, he argued, one could find in the "latest commercial, educational, and domestic structures in and near our larger cities,"<sup>98</sup> the exposition grounds would not be the place to look for this, its transitory nature would not allow for it. Instead it would be as a large pageant, its buildings acting as architectural screens to create "that rest, grace and harmony, which are needed as a compensation for materialism...so that some elements of "sweetness and light" may be brought forward to counterbalance the boastful Philistinism of our times."<sup>99</sup> The architecture at the exposition should serve as a massive object lesson in history and good taste. This would be an American exposition, not in terms of display, but in its target audience, to show artistic parity with Europe and to educate its domestic visitors. The exposition Van Brunt hoped would be "more instructive than emulative,"<sup>100</sup> especially to visiting architects. The kernel of his argument in this way ostensibly being the following utterance:

It is not desired or expected that this display, however successful it may prove to be in execution, should make a new revival or new school in the architecture of our country, or interfere with any healthy advance on classic or romantic lines in which may be evolving here. There are many uneducated and untrained men practising as architects, and still maintaining, especially in the remote regions of the country, an impure and unhealthy vernacular, incapable of progress; men who have never seen a pure classic monument executed on a great scale, and who are ignorant of the emotions which it must excite in any breast accesible to the influences of art. To such it is hoped that these great models,

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<sup>97</sup> Henry van Brunt, "Architecture at the Worlds Columbian Exposition" (1892) as printed in: *ibid.* p. 233

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.* p. 232

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.* p. 235 -36

<sup>100</sup> Henry van Brunt , "The Columbian Exposition and American Civilization" (1893) as printed in: *ibid.* p. 306

inspired as they have been by profound respect for the masters of classic art, will prove such a revelation that they will learn at last that true architecture cannot be based on undisciplined invention, illiterate originality, or indeed any audacity of ignorance.<sup>101</sup>

### **The reasoning of choices**

This is then how the architects for the Court of Honor interpreted their mission, and based on Burnham's own writing it seems safe to say that this is exactly why they were chosen, their ability to display an instructive artistic ideal. His description of the different stylistic aspects of the exposition in his *Final Report* is highly suggestive of this. Burnham lists seven distinct parts which were: The Court of Honor, the wooded island and its surroundings with the rest of the main exhibition halls, the Governments location of states and foreign delegations, the Federal location, the Midway Plaisance, the outdoor and anthropological exhibits and lastly the railway and auxiliary structures. In describing these Burnham's terminology is telling: In speaking about the Court of Honor Burnham talks of using "the Grand Styles" where "...every element was intended to enhance the dignity and the high conventional quality of the design as a whole."<sup>102</sup> The word *dignity* is here very important because it is to Burnham what separates it, and elevates it above, the other parts where he instead talks of *expression*. *Dignity* is here the aim and height of what a work of true architecture may achieve, whereas *expression* is something that is "allowed," tolerated, and not necessarily encouraged. In the other main exhibition grounds around the wooded island, Burnham explains that here freedom of style was allowed but that one still insisted on "a dignified repose and harmony of parts." In the rest of the parts Burnham tells that *expression* was allowed, meaning that he and the Commission of Architects exerted no control over the results, and could not be held responsible to their "quality" and "varying success." Here of course the Midway Plaisance was the hardest to stomach for Burnham which is where one "...relegated the Villages of Nations buildings and Concessionaires, including the Ferris Wheel, the ice Railway, and many things which were purely "shows."<sup>103</sup> Related to this division in classification one may see similar thoughts articulated in Viollet-le-Duc's essay "Style" in his *Dictionnaire raisonné*.<sup>104</sup> Here Viollet-le-Duc posits a definition of "style" as the "manifestation of an ideal

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<sup>101</sup> *ibid.* p. 234

<sup>102</sup> Daniel H. Burnham, *op. cit.* p. 49

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française de XIe au XVe siècle*, first published 1854.



based on a principle” and further distinguishes between what he calls “*absolute*” and “*relative*” style, where: “The first dominates the entire artistic conception of an object; the second can be modified depending upon the purpose of the object.”<sup>105</sup> Style is here noteworthy not only a type of construction, but a way of construction. This principle then is in Burnham and his associates’ case the concept of an architecture based upon the purpose of creating architecture as art and the unity of this concept as deployed throughout the *dignified* parts of the grounds. The ideal to achieve this principle, this *dignity* and *absolute style*, was in their minds the use of the classical forms. Burnham’s use of the word *dignity* to describe this aim is as stated interesting, and may semantically enlighten us towards the reasoning behind why this is the case. It is used of something which ensures the “quality of the design as a whole” and where every object is “carefully considered in relation to the surroundings.”<sup>106</sup> The *dignity* comes as a result of the unity of design and the harmony of parts. The focus is a holistic one of purposive unity, a preoccupation prevalent in nineteenth century architectural theory, traceable back to the renaissance. Alberti for example names this quality *concinnitas*<sup>107</sup>. This is “a common element, shared by art and nature” by which “opposing elements and qualities in design are unified”<sup>108</sup> It is a quality of art and beauty achieved through “a unity based on a plan or concept of the whole, that determines the structure of the parts.”<sup>109</sup> For Alberti it is a concept derived from the experiences and experiments of the Greeks (in other words, the classical forms) for which he states that they:

...sought it in, and drew it out from the very bosom of Nature... They added, took away, and adjusted greater to smaller. Like to unlike, first to last, until they had established the different qualities desirable in those buildings intended to endure for ages, and those erected for no reason as much as their good looks. This was their achievement.<sup>110</sup>

Caroline van Eck explains that *concinnitas* must be interpreted “in terms of purposive unity, plan and aptness.” It refers to a “unity of opposing and varying qualities that is made possible because the artist acts according to a logically prior plan or concept of the whole, by which all

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<sup>105</sup> Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *The Foundations of Architecture, Selections from the Dictionnaire raisonné*, trans. Kenneth D. Whitehead (George Braziller: New York, 1990) pp. 232-233

<sup>106</sup> Daniel H. Burnham, op. cit. p. 49

<sup>107</sup> The term occurs in book IX of Leon Battista Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria* from 1452.

<sup>108</sup> Caroline van Eck, *Organicism in nineteenth-century architecture, an inquiry into its theoretical and philosophical background*, (Architectura & Natura Press: Amsterdam, 1994) p. 48

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Leon Battista Alberti as quoted in: Caroline van Eck, op. cit. p. 49

the parts and the relations between them and the whole are regulated and determined.”<sup>111</sup> The result of striving for this quality was a view of architecture which focused not primarily on technical and structural features, but on its role in and effect on its surroundings. Architecture here has a “civilizing function” and like other art forms “has as its aim to persuade the mind and move the emotions.”<sup>112</sup> Burnham’s (and Van Brunt’s) statements one then may observe is wholly in line with such thought and reasoning which then helps to shed light on their choice of architectural style and way of planning, but also further on the *purpose* of the architecture, which will be elaborated on in the coming chapter.

By product of all these thoughts and guidelines Burnham made his selection of the mentioned main architects. Root had by this point withdrawn from active participation to a role of judge and facilitator as a result of criticism from the east that Chicago, as Root stated, was “going to hog it all.”<sup>113</sup> (I.e. create the whole exposition in its image without help from the rest of the country.) Discrediting this idea with his selection, Burnham now found the other shoe dropping, with pressure rising from local circles about the lack of Chicago architects for the most important commissions. When questioned by the Committee on Grounds and Buildings about this, Burnham insisted on his authority in these matters citing that: “...it was not a question of men, but of Art, and his knowledge of the capabilities of the architects and their power of bringing about harmony ought to be and was superior to that of laymen of which the Committee was composed.”<sup>114</sup> Burnham was nevertheless ordered to recommend ten names of Chicago to design the exposition, but after increased insistence from Burnham concerning his authority as Chief of Construction and responsible for matters of “hiring and discharging all employees,” a compromise was agreed upon where five names of Chicago would be named in addition to the other five. Burnham thus promptly nominated:

Adler & Sullivan

W. L. B. Jenney

Henry Ives Cobb

S.S. Beman

Burling & Whitehouse

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<sup>111</sup> Caroline van Eck, op. cit. p. 132

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Harriet Monroe, op. cit. p. 235

<sup>114</sup> Daniel H. Burnham, op. cit. p. 9

The specific buildings to be designed by each were not here determined, but left to Burnham, Root and the Commission of Architects formed out of the ten chosen. In their first meeting on January 15<sup>th</sup> 1891<sup>115</sup> the different buildings were assigned as follows:

Administration: Hunt

Agriculture: McKim, Mead & White

Machinery: Peabody & Stearns

Manufacture: Post

Electricity: Van Brunt & Howe

Horticulture: Jenney & Mundie

Fisheries: Cobb

Venetian Village: Burling & Whitehouse

Mines: S.S. Beman

Transportation: Adler & Sullivan

Of these, only the Mines building was a part of the Court of Honor of the commissions given to Chicago men, upholding Burnham's will that when it came to the question of the sufficient art, dignity and unity of purpose (*concinntitas*) he saw as his responsibility to ensure, he found the local names a risk. When the construction was well on its way in the summer of 1892, Burnham's role was changed to Director of Works, continuing his control over the exposition even when its progress entered a more administrative phase.

To conclude it would appear fair to state the following: By virtue of the business model on which the corporation of The World's Columbian Exposition was set up, through which the involved politicians and businessmen was used to safeguard effectivization and results (of one head under whom all others reported), Burnham was from the start given broad powers. That these powers were intended to be more of a managerial nature, executing the will of whoever was chosen to design the exposition, but which turned increasingly authoritative and executive by the death of Root and by the short timeframe involved which resulted in the choice of direct selection of architects. From the decrees already put in place, their appointment thus ended up the responsibility of Burnham to whom they would also report as his accrued role of Chief Architect. Furthermore no complete scheme of "plans and specifications" were in place and presented to the Board or Congress until "...a few months

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<sup>115</sup> Root was not present in this meeting due to illness and died shortly afterwards.

before the Fair was opened”<sup>116</sup> leaving it up the Department of Works and the Commission of Architects to make the decisions as they went along. These facts undoubtedly gave Burnham and the appointees a large amount of freedom, but as for example Karlowicz argues,<sup>117</sup> in reality not a complete blank cheque to do as they pleased. Although a detailed plan was not presented for Congress to approve they did have the power to veto all appointments and decisions they did not see fit, and that from its inception, and in fact boosted by the selection of Chicago, this was to be an American and national exposition. This element of the “national” is then an aspect which demanded participation from the established east and compromises on style and design. The style emerging in Jackson Park was not the creation of one man and his accomplices, but was guided by the thoughts of the nation’s image and ideals manifested. From their allowed freedom of choice as argued, the solutions could have been different, one for example can only speculate what would have happened if Root had not died. Root himself had plans for buildings in a Romanesque style, and ideas of a more festive polychromatic architecture, but still his thoughts were traditional and turned towards established practices of the past, revering in the opportunity to at last create something solely beautiful and not merely practical. Here the contemporary ideas of Art comes into play and it would seem that to all the participating architects, even Sullivan who at the time voiced no opposition to the plans, this meant something displaying aspects of beauty and dignity. This they thought, should be done through the classical forms and evoke when this was done best in human history, the renaissance, of which many at the time saw America as the heir. The sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens for example, who served as artistic consultant to the fair, stated to Burnham at a planning session that: “Look here old fellow, do you realize that this is the greatest meeting of artists since the fifteenth century!”<sup>118</sup> There was no lack of confidence in the fields of science, industry and engineering, but when it came to Art, America they felt, had still much to learn. The potential was there however, and to the participating architects this was what a temporary fair entailed architecturally, the showing of creativity and discipline on a grand scale. To show Europe and the world that the fair could embody America’s civilizational and democratic ideals through architecture and through this instruct and inspire its own peoples.

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<sup>116</sup> Daniel H. Burnham, op. cit. p. 49

<sup>117</sup> Titus M. Karlowicz, op. cit. pp. 253-254

<sup>118</sup> As quoted in: Richard Guy Wilson, “Architecture and the Reinterpretation of the Past in the American Renaissance,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Spring, 1983) p. 69



Figure. 14.  
A bird's eye view of the exposition grounds from Lake Michigan.

### 3.

This chapter will focus on the actual construction of White City, its physical appearance, layout and architectural features. This will be done in light of the previous chapters; of Chicago's architectural image, the people involved and the reasoning and intentions of the White City architectural scheme. The chosen buildings will be analyzed according to appearance and the stated intentions of the architects. This will be related to the visitors' experience of the buildings and their purpose and use. Further, one of the main aspects to be looked at is the notion of "purpose," of how the architects understood their task and how that was carried out. As such the chapter lays the foundations for the coming chapter which deals with the relationship of the outside with the inside, architecture as framing and the possible narratives created and experienced by the visitors through the properties discussed below.

#### **Form follows purpose**

If one then, as would be natural, compares the creations of The Loop with those of White City, they would of course instantly invite contradiction. A rupture in the architectural continuity? As mentioned earlier, the buildings in Jackson Park received no little scorn in their afterlife, particularly from the cult of Sullivan and the modernists through to the 1970's. One of those skeptics, Sigfried Giedion points to a contemporary critic, the Belgian engineer Arthur Vierendeel who stated of the exposition that: "...the constructions were only imitations of what we have known in Europe for a long time. We expected better, much better, from the well known audacity, initiative, and originality of the Americans. We have been profoundly deceived...in a new world they dared no innovations. They had doubts of themselves."<sup>119</sup> Many other European observers felt the same way, they came for spectacle and industrial monumentality but were met with an attempted Altruria<sup>120</sup> In more concrete terms they were also disappointed with the perceived loss of the concept of form in relation to function, that the purpose of a building and the materials needed to construct it should shape

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<sup>119</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture, the growth of a new tradition*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 1967) p. 276

<sup>120</sup> After William Dean Howell's novel from 1893 *A Traveler from Altruria*, where the utopian society of Altruria with its planned cities, egalitarian society and focus on culture is contrasted with the United States.

its appearance, as they saw it in the commercial architecture of The Loop.<sup>121</sup> One could easily draw the conclusion that when juxtaposed the manifestations of The Loop and White City were on the surface indeed irreconcilable, and thus also for several of the involved architects. As already argued however, the architects' attitudes differed when it came to public architecture, and most of all, temporary architecture. Their training and earlier practices were not discarded, but the very function of this type of architecture was understood differently. The *purpose* of it was understood differently. To illustrate this one can for example look to the leading regional trade journal *The Inland Architect* which understandably followed the developing exposition closely. The following quotes are telling of their understanding and judgment of the architecture displayed. In one of the earliest examples of reports relating to the coming architecture of the fair one may for example read:

As an architectural study the design, construction and ornamentation involved in the World's Fair buildings will be most valuable to every architect, engineer and artist who may visit this grand collection of architectural forms, and the general enlightenment and advancement along these lines will be a lasting benefit to this country and the world.<sup>122</sup>

The buildings are here perceived in wholly architectural terms. Their existence is as a display of architecture and this is their function; creations of architecture, creations of an architect. As touched on in the previous chapter, the social (and also moral) aspects of architecture had been a fascination, if not to say obsession, of many nineteenth-century architects. Caroline van Eck relates this preoccupation with the thoughts of "organicism" in architecture, that art's highest ideal should be to imitate and confer the qualities of living nature, and that it should be as an "organic" part of its "habitat." Organicism, van Eck states, "can be described as a strategy of invention, by which stylistic decisions are made and justified, or as a strategy of interpretation, through which the meaning of architecture, and especially of the architecture of the past, can be formulated."<sup>123</sup> In America, these thoughts were in writing perhaps best articulated by the architect Leopold Eidlitz who: "Architecture deals with ideas, and with ideas only. In the forming of a structure, it attempts to depict the soul of the structure, not

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<sup>121</sup> The much publicized and affiliated maxim of "form follows function" was later made famous by Sullivan in the 1896 article "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered" and used for all it is worth for the posterior advocates of the "Lost cause", but as pointed out also touched on earlier by Root (note 35) and common in the practices behind the buildings of The Loop.

<sup>122</sup> *Inland Architect and News Record*, Vol. XIX No. 5 (Jun., 1892) p. 56

<sup>123</sup> Caroline van Eck, op. cit. p. 19

merely to minister to the physical wants of its occupants.”<sup>124</sup> The main aspect of this type of architecture, by which it derives its character and communicates its *purpose*, is in this case the quality of *concinnitas*. About what this is, Alberti states:

Beauty is a form of sympathy and consonance of the parts within a body, according to a definite number, outline, and position, as dictated by *concinnitas*, the absolute and fundamental rule in Nature. This is the main object of the art of building, and source of her dignity, charm, authority and worth.<sup>125</sup>

To achieve this quality was in the architects of the fair’s eyes the *purpose* of public architecture of this type. Here was the possibility of the architect to be finally let loose as artist, and recognized as such. In an issue of *The Inland Architect* one may then read about the deceased Root that: “The architectural profession cannot afford to forget the services rendered it by that great soul that left us and whose last work was that of using all his influence in procuring that recognition for his profession which was so justly its due and which the public has heretofore been so niggard in according.”<sup>126</sup> As portrayed in the earlier quote from the *Inland Architect* the fair is here as a “study”, a study to instruct and inspire, it is not meant to last, but to establish what an architect can do in service of the public. This is then in contrast to what the journal sees as being the situation in the actual architecture of the fair’s surrounding cities, stating that:

While the architects of all countries are viewing the unexcelled panorama exhibited by the “White City” of the Columbian Exposition, they will be astonished that in a country where so artistic a conception can be evolved by native artists – that is so rich in architectural talent – that they find a condition indicative of the direct opposite when they turn to the architecture that belongs to the public.<sup>127</sup>

From this statement one may deduce two things: The difference in the architects’ thoughts around commercial and public architecture and the difference between architecture conceived through art guided by *concinnitas* and that of “mere” engineering. The idea of the architect artist versus the architect constructor. The reference point for the exposition was from the start the world’s fair held in Paris four years earlier in 1889, not only in terms of size, but in terms

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<sup>124</sup> Leopold Eidlitz as quoted from his 1881 book *The Nature and Function of Art, more especially of Architecture*, in Caroline van Eck, op. cit. p.

<sup>125</sup> Leon Battista Alberti as quoted from his *De re aedificatoria* in: Caroline van Eck, op. cit. p. 46

<sup>126</sup> *Inland Architect and News Record*, Vol. XX No. 4 (Nov., 1892) p. 34

<sup>127</sup> *Inland Architect and News Record*, Vol. XXI No. 6 (Jul., 1893) p. 68



of the art form of architecture. In this regard *The Inland Architect* wrote in July 1893, midway through the Chicago exposition's run, that:

Architecture has been by common consent admitted to be the most prominent feature and crowning glory of the Exposition...The last Paris exposition was an attempt to do architecturally what has been a success at Chicago, but the best available talent was not employed. Engineering as always before was predominant [and] have done little to exert an influence or perpetuate a memory...It is natural that France should be content with the glories of her architecture, ancient and modern, and rest on her laurels. Hence the projectors of her last great effort did not feel that incentive which actuates us today to use the art of architecture as a great educator.<sup>128</sup>

Here one sees clearly the differentiation between what is perceived as art and what is thought of as construction; engineering is functional, architecture is performative, drawing a line in the sand between "themselves" and Sauvestre and Dutert<sup>129</sup> et al. Foreign visitors were astonished, exclaiming that what they expected in Chicago they got in Paris and vice versa. The Inland architect took it as a triumph stating in all humility about the Chicago fair that: "...no architect in the world should fail to see this great architectural triumph...nothing has ever existed that equals the general harmony and balance sustained by each part of the general composition."<sup>130</sup> The main function of the architectural scheme, the form, seems in their creators' eyes to be to provide models to be studied and admired, a vast vista to imbue their visitors with thoughts of cultures past and utopias present. How does such a concept correspond to the actual exhibitions taking place in their bowels? This is one of the key issues dealt with in this work; White City as exhibition architecture and architecture as framing. How would the buildings' walls and vaults create spaces, boundaries, ambience and protection for their exhibited content and how would the visitor experience, move around in and fathom their surroundings? Which conclusions, narratives and savoir-faires do they support? To examine this one must first have a firm grasp of what all this looked like, how exactly the constructions the visitors were confronted with were presented, and most importantly, how did they facilitate the architects enounced purpose. Their *purpose* of creating a unified artistic image based on *concinnitas* that could educate and move the public. Are the results in line with the architects, and the buildings, actual purpose?

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<sup>128</sup> *Inland Architect and News Record*, Vol. XXI No. 6 (Jul., 1893) p. 72

<sup>129</sup> Stephen Sauvestre and Ferdinand Dutert, the architects of "the Tour Eiffel" and "the Galeries des Machines" respectively, at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris 1889.

<sup>130</sup> *Inland Architect and News Record*, Vol. XXII No. 6 (Aug., 1893) p. 2

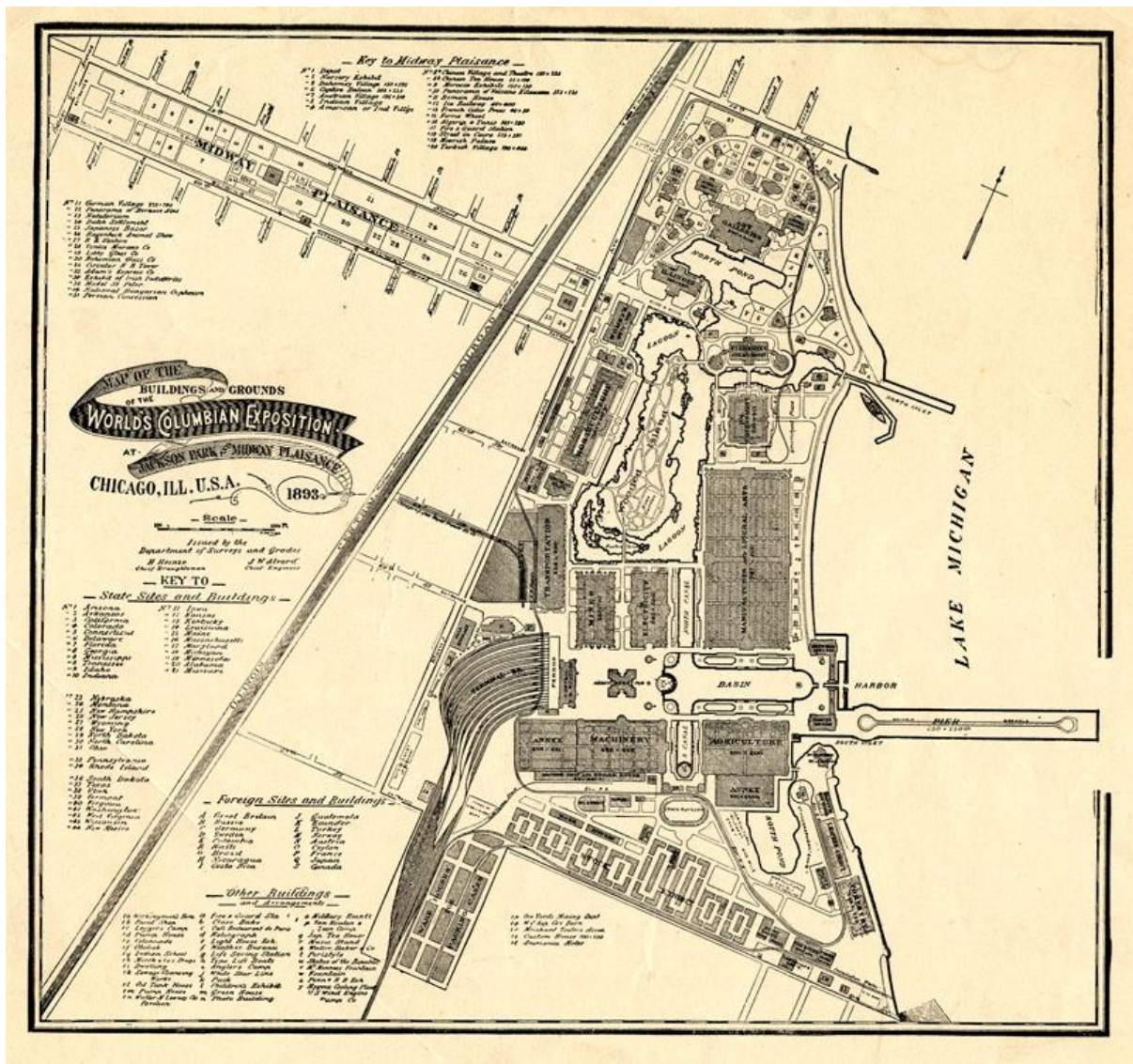


Figure 15.  
Official map of the exposition grounds by Rand McNally.

## White City rising

On January 10, 1891, the first meeting of the architects took place in the office of Burnham and Root, Mr. Burnham drove the visitors to Jackson Park. It was a cold, cloudy, winter day, the Lake was white with foam...Robert Peabody climbed up on a pier, looked around at the desolate place and called down, "Do you mean to say that you really propose opening a Fair here by '93?" "Yes," said Mr. Burnham, "we intend to." "It can't be done," said Mr. Peabody. "That point is settled," was Mr. Burnham's reply.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Jessie Palmer Weber, "The Fine Arts Building in Jackson Park, Chicago, and a Brief Account of Some of the World's Fair Architects: Correction of a Statement Made in the Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1908-1984), Vol. 17, No. 3 (Oct., 1924) pp. 421-22



Figure 16.  
Manufactures building under construction.

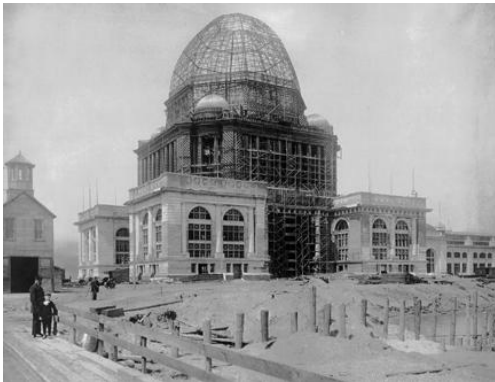


Figure 17.  
Administration building under construction.

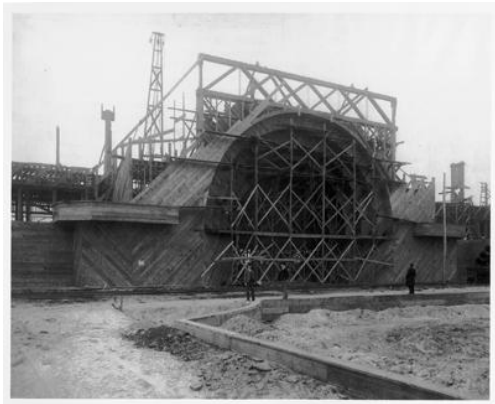


Figure 18.  
Transportation building under construction.

This anecdote was recounted by historian Jessie Palmer Weber in an article in 1924 as if told directly by Burnham. If it is completely accurate or not is hard to verify, Burnham might for example have exaggerated his own resolve in hindsight, but nevertheless it gives a glimpse into the amount of work awaiting the constructors. The site was in the end over 600 acres, laid out in a rectangular shape north to south with Lake Michigan to the east. A wooden shack was constructed for Burnham so he could spend almost all his time supervising the work. Twelve thousand workers were hired to do this work, of constructing the 14 principal buildings and about 200 other smaller structures for states, foreign governments, railroad stations, restaurants, businesses etc. These fourteen main buildings are the ten mentioned earlier minus the Venetian Village which was scrapped, but added to by the Art Building, Women's Building and buildings for Leather, Forestry, and Anthropology. The focal point of the grounds was as stated the Court of Honor, an arrangement of the main exhibition halls around a basin of water where the giant statue of the Republic and the Columbian fountain could be found. The court was arranged primarily in a west – east configuration where one would ideally enter

through the railroad terminal at the western end, come out facing the east where one would be confronted by the massive dome of the Administration building, walk through this to buy one's entry ticket, maps and guides to the grounds and come out the other side where one would face the basin. Here one would see the peristyle at the very eastern opposite and Lake Michigan behind it, to the right one would have Machinery and Agriculture and to the left Electricity, Mining and Manufactures and Liberal Art. In the words of Scribner's Magazine's guide the impression would be thus:

If he comes in by the main entrance, the idea of order and system is presented to him at the very outset. All the entering railroads converge here to a single perron, or platform, in front of which stands a square building, surmounted by a gilded dome. This is the Administration Building...It is placed here to serve a double purpose, to form a vestibule to the Fair of impressive and symmetrical dignity and beauty, and to show the new-comer on his arrival the headquarters of control and management. Under this shining dome he passes to what may be called the grand court of the Exhibition, a mighty quadrangle, flanked on either side by towering white facades, and bounded at its farther end by a majestic peristyle raising its long array of columns against the clear background of an enclosed harbor. An artificial lake or basin of water occupies the greater part of this quadrangle, at its head stretching out into a long transept of canals, the northerly arm connecting with a long, irregularly-shaped lagoon at whose farthest end the pillared front of a classic temple rises from the water's very edge.<sup>132</sup>

This classic temple was Charles Atwood's Art Building which was situated near the northern end of the grounds with only the different state pavilions behind it. In front of the building was a pond connected to the lagoon where one in its center could find the Wooded Island with the Japanese pavilion. On the lagoons eastern shores one could visit the other foreign pavilions, The Fisheries Building and the U.S. Federal Building which according to the guide "ought to illuminate the soul of even a Congressman from Darkest Kansas,"<sup>133</sup> this was just to the north of the Court of Honor's Manufactures and Liberal Art's Building. On the western shore one could see the host state's building, the Women's Building, The Horticulture Building and at the south-western end, neighbouring the Mines Building, Sullivan's Transportation Building. Into the Lake extended from the Peristyle one could walk along the 2,500 feet long pier, or be transported on its movable sidewalk. To the south of the court one had the stock exhibitions and the buildings devoted to leather, forestry and anthropology, among others. Going westwards behind the Women's Building one had the long avenue of Midway Plaisance with its Villages of Nations, concessionaries, Ferris Wheel and the like. The strict classicism was as stated reserved for the buildings at the court, but all other official buildings were also covered in staff and painted white, creating White City.

Despite possible paradoxes, dilemmas and controversies the Coer d'Honneur was to be as it became; white, classical, august and autocratic. In concert it had been agreed by the Commission of Architects that all the buildings should be resplendent in white uniformity and

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<sup>132</sup> H.C. Bunner, "The Making of White City," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. XII, No. 4 (October, 1892), p. 414

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.* p. 416

as mentioned constructed in the *Grand Styles*, which were as Van Brunt explains: “a style evolved from, and expressive of, the highest civilizations in history.”<sup>134</sup> Here that would mainly entail the Roman Classic, but with an important appendage in their guidelines as being “correctly and loyally interpreted, but permitting variations suggested not only by the Italians, but by the other masters of the Renaissance.”<sup>135</sup> The effect in essence being that what would be on display would not only be the Roman as Vitruvian, but also allowing its interpretations employed throughout Europe in its rebirth. Still strictly classical, but also modulated; meaning, Roman, southern Renaissance or Beaux-Art inspired architecture. The results of this “loophole” was then a uniformity of colour, size (they had agreed on common units of dimensions) and general style, but one that allowed for some individual treatment nevertheless, as we shall see in the two buildings to be examined in detail: Van Brunt & Howe’s Electricity Hall and Peabody & Stearns’ Machinery Hall.

These two buildings, Machinery Hall and the Electricity Building, have been singled out because of their exhibitory functions. They are advantageous as subject matter in looking at the buildings as modern exhibition halls, seeing as their mission was to house some of the most groundbreaking scientific novelties of the day. Their exhibited content would be industrial and of a technological nature, in stark contrast with their exteriors. The halls of this kind already had a long tradition of being some of the most avant-garde and futuristic buildings at the previous World’s Fairs. Further they would normally also be some of the largest and most popular type of buildings because of their out of the ordinary nature, the trend being that the buildings should correspond to their innovative content. As such they would be the most beneficial to investigate through and analysis of *purpose* and *framing*. They were the buildings of progress and scientific spectacle, but their walls and outward appearance seemingly in opposition to *this* purpose. How did this then play out at this World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893? Let us first look at the physical features of the two structures.

## Entering White City

While they were at their first stage they were less substantial than most skeletons. They looked like mere cobwebs of timber and iron. Next their sides were latticed with thin wood-work, so that you saw

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<sup>134</sup> Henry Van Brunt as quoted in: William Walton, *Art & Architecture*, (Philadelphia: G. Barrie, 1893) p. xv

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*

their full dimensions and artistic outlines and proportions, and yet could look right through them as if they were architectural ghosts. To-day some are partially at that stage and partially clothed with the staff that is to make them all look like palaces of marble or of ivory. They rise on every hand to great heights with graceful arches and picturesque towers and pinnacles, and already reveal bits of storied entablature, groups of statuary, reaches of decorated frieze, and, in short, strong hints of all that is to compose them.<sup>136</sup>

This is how the building process is described in *Harper's* travelogue of Chicago and the impending fair. As mentioned the buildings were built as temporary warehouses of sorts and then furnished with staff and molded into specters of solidity. The construction process and their evanescent nature will not be elaborated on here, but will be helpful to have in mind for the coming descriptions and analyses of the finished products. Amidst the anticipation of what was to come, the wonderment was just as much directed towards the organization and industry making it all possible as it was towards the structures themselves. The fair was constructed in record speed, with principal construction taking less than two years. In comparison, the Paris fair of 1889, which was under half the size of the Chicago one, took three years to build. The following quote by H. H. Bancroft illustrates vividly the amazement at scope and speed:

While the buildings were in process of construction one could almost realize the colossal proportions of this enterprise. Entering the grounds in the spring of 1892, the visitor beheld such a scene of bustling activity as that which at the founding of Carthage greeted the father of the Roman race when first he set foot on Punic shores. And yet it was a silent activity that pervaded this groups of mammoth structures, while pillars and walls and domes were rising around him. Here was an army of mechanics, with hammer and saw and mallet, all plying their tools with the vigor of a true American workman; but amid the wide spaces that separated these huge architectural efforts the noise was barely perceptible. Then there was an air of unreality about this congregation of edifices, so strange in dimensions and design, rising as from the touch of a fairy's wand at the bidding of some potent agency. On one hand might be seen the two sections of an immense iron arch meeting as silently as shadows flitting athwart the sky; on another a pillar of stucco, the height of a two-story house, being hoisted into air by a wire rope, and placed in position by a couple of men two hundred feet above ground.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Julian Ralph, *Harper's Chicago and The World's Fair*, (Harper and Brothers Publishers: New York, 1892) p.

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<sup>137</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair*, (Chicago: The Bancroft Company, Publishers, 1893) p. 49

About the actual architecture that was to be on display, confidence was also high with Scribner's having this to say about the planned architecture:

Whatever individual taste or scholarship may find to question or reject in the details of this marvellous plaza, with its thronging facades, its spacious water-ways, its treasures of columns and fountains; the people who go out to see a great and beautiful sight would be mean and ungracious if they sought to weaken by ungenerous analysis the satisfying impression of grandeur and beauty, and of eminent fitness and good taste, produced by the whole picture.<sup>138</sup>



Figure 19.  
Electricity Building, Main Entrance



Figure 20.  
Electricity Building, Northern façade

This is what its makers as well sought to impose on the Court of Honor's visitor. Did they succeed in this, and if so, how did that affect the overall visitor experience? The Electrical building of van Brunt & Howe was placed between The Mines building and the behemoth of the Manufacturing and Liberal Arts building on the north side of the grand court. Placed in a general north – south orientation its main entrance was the southern one facing The Court of Honor, opposite Machinery Hall with The Administration Building and The Macmonnies fountain in between. The structure stood 700 feet long and 345 feet wide, the walls were 62 feet tall at the cornice and 68 at the balustrade, but their tallest points were its ten towers which rose to 150 feet at the four corners

and to 169 feet above the east, west and north entrances. As one understands from its dimensions the structure is of rectangular shape and as its central form is an almost ecclesial nave 115 feet wide and 114 feet tall, running the entire length of the north – south axis and crossed in the middle by a transept of the same height and width. The exterior walls were composed of a continuous order of Corinthian pilasters, 3, 6 feet wide and 42 feet height. The main south façade was covered in a portico screened by an Ionic colonnade with the main entrance built up as a triumphal arch, complete with pediment, tympanum and attic. One here enters through a narrow coffered soffit into a hemicycle with a statue of Benjamin Franklin in

<sup>138</sup> H.C. Bunner, "The Making of White City," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. XII, No. 4 (October, 1892), p. 415



the centre surrounded by entranceways into the building overlooked by aediculae. The main features of the east and west entrances are reminiscent of Roman temple constructions with frontal pediment and prostyle, but altered with a protruding bottom portico and flanked by one of the mentioned towers on each side. The north entrance is again different from the others; a cathedral like entrance with side towers opening into a “open” barrel vault only covered by glass intersected by the Corinthian pilasters in four stories. The nave and the transept had pitched roofs with several skylights, and the four corner sections had flat roofs, also with skylights. The general appearance of the building was meant to resemble marble, but with some color treatment in the frontal hemicycle and various porticos. The building’s function was naturally to house items and machinations related to the new field of electricity. The exterior was also thought of to emphasize this purpose at night with electrical illumination on the towers and through the many window spaces and the installation of searchlights on the roof of the building.

It is stated in the official guide that the building “carries out the Spanish Renaissance idea, modified by a Corinthian treatment.”<sup>139</sup> This might be a justified statement if one considers the towers and internal structure as modeled on such Spanish designs as for example the *Escorial* near Madrid, with a Corinthian order of pilasters, peristyles and porticos attached to its exterior and a few Albertian tricks to its entrances, although not many have received the more roman pilaster, peristyle and portico treatment.<sup>140</sup> This is not to suggest that the description of the building is incorrect, as stated taken at face value the phrasing of: “carries out the Spanish Renaissance idea, modified by a Corinthian treatment,” is accurate enough, the issue is that this does not seem to have occurred at any point during the Spanish Renaissance itself. This is not a problem if one merely looks at the buildings appearance; the

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<sup>139</sup> Edited by The Department of Publicity and Promotion. M. P. Handy. Chief., *Plans and Diagrams of all Exhibit Buildings in the World’s Columbian Exposition*, (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1893) p. 33

<sup>140</sup> Most structures in Spain of this style have generally chosen more solid and humble exteriors and reserved the more open and opulent uses of porticos, peristyles, columns and pilasters, if any, for its interiors and courtyards. This is especially the case for structures built in the more severe *Herreran* style in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. (After the Spanish architect Juan de Herrera (1530 - 1597) who was responsible for some of the periods most well known and influential buildings such as The Escorial, the Cathedral of Valladolid and the “Lonja” in Seville.) Even in earlier more lavish renaissance times in Spain with the *Plateresque* style (The style takes its name after the word “platero” meaning silversmith, as its rich ornamental features resembled silverwork. The style may be said to be a mix of Gothic structural practices with Moorish and Italianate ornamental traditions.) being prevalent in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century and at its end coinciding with a *classical* period one may not find examples of such an ornamental and open composition. At its most Italianate and exuberant as in the example of Pedro Machuco’s *Palace of Charles V at Alhambra* which does employ pilasters, half columns of the more ornamental orders, this type of treatment is still saved for its interior.



building was by all means imposing and by most accounts beautiful to behold. It also fulfills its function to an extent of creating a space to show off the many objects and contrivements inside. One may also argue that it was partly down to its function as a temporary exhibition hall that lead to its more outwardly open and inviting feature than its claimed style would suggests. This though, does not eschew the issue arising when it comes to the architectural principles laid down for the program of White City. As stated, Henry van Brunt, the senior architect of the Electrical building, had been very vocal in his support and praise for the purity of design for White City and the use of the *Grand Styles*. The question is then if one should see the results of his design as a matter of renaissance classicism “correctly and loyally interpreted, but permitting variations”<sup>141</sup> and as such his liberties and modifications taken with his building as demonstrating that grasp of tradition and constituting “that larger and more copious language of form.”<sup>142</sup> Or, perhaps it is rather a case of van Brunt taking too much license, not sufficiently restrained by “historical authority”<sup>143</sup> and then instead the result in fact, as he himself dabbling in eclecticism, bordering on that “unhealthy vernacular.” This would be the case particularly if considering the east and west entrances, with their Spanish towers and Roman temple pediment, balcony and portico. An interesting aspect of the stylistic description is here of course also the need to attribute it to a specific origin at all. That in doing so they seem to attempt to appropriate a European tradition, to make it their own, and as such legitimize their own practice. The large presence of glass in the building’s façade is here also noteworthy, serving as a reminder of its de facto contemporariness and dual purpose; as on one side “dignified” part of the *absolute style* of the Court of Honor and White City, and on the other of the more *relative style* of being the electricity exhibition hall. At night, as mentioned, the buildings exterior was further esthetically transformed with the staging of electrical light shows in combination with the electrical fountains of the adjacent basin. When dusk had settled the scenery went from serene to spectacle, but still with the focus on a unified approach for the grounds as a whole. David E. Nye writes that:

The Columbian Exposition in Chicago had more lighting than any city in the country. Some visitors saw more electric light in a single night at the fair than they had previously seen in their entire lives...fountains shot water high into the air and wove complex patterns against the night sky. To

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<sup>141</sup> Henry Van Brunt as quoted in: William Walton, *Art & Architecture*, (Philadelphia: G. Barrie, 1893) p. xv

<sup>142</sup> Henry Van Brunt, “The Growth of Characteristic Architectural Style in the United States (1893) as printed in: *Architecture and Society, Selected Essays of Henry Van Brunt*, (Cambridge, Ma.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969) p. 327

<sup>143</sup> Henry van Brunt, “Architecture at the Worlds Columbian Exposition” (1892) as printed in: *ibid.* p. 233

further dramatize the scene, the spotlights were fitted with filter systems that permitted the operators to create symphonies of color.<sup>144</sup>



Figure 21.  
The Grand Basin at night.

These nocturnal shows proved some of the most popular at the fair with “an expectant throng”<sup>145</sup> of people crowding the basin long before the displays had begun, adding yet another aspect of allure to the fairgrounds. What was the effect of all this then on the average fairgoer and on the building’s function as an exhibition hall? All this will be looked at in the coming chapters, but let us first move on to Peabody & Stearns’ Machinery Hall.

Machinery Hall, or the Palace of Mechanic Art as was its official name, was located directly opposite the Electricity Building, on the other side of the Administration Building at the very south western end of the Court of Honor. It consisted of two parts, the main building and an annex housing the machinery necessary for powering the entire fair. Its shape was rectangular in an east-west orientation placed on the same axis as McKim, Mead and White’s Agricultural Building, but separated from it by a canal flowing southwards from the central basin. The main building measured 850 feet in length and was 500 feet broad. The building was spanned by three arched trusses of 125 feet each in width, creating three large vaulted sheds, or naves, running almost the entirety of the building from east to west. In their centers were placed three domes in a straight line backwards from the northern main entrance facing the court. The three naves were aired and lighted by monitor windows only interrupted by the domes which were also 125 feet in diameter and clad with glass. In all the floor space underneath it amounted to over 23 acres. Around this great open space created by the adjacent naves and domes ran a 50 feet wide two-story arcade on the east, west, and north sides, creating a vast gallery which was open towards the main hall on both floors. In the four corners one could find domed pavilions which in their interior served as grand staircases going up to the galleries. On the outside the façade of this structure one could see a low roman arcade supporting an upper Corinthian colonnade complete with entablature and balustrade. At the

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<sup>144</sup> David E. Nye, *The American Technological Sublime*, (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1994) pp. 147-148

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.* p. 148



Figure 22.  
Machinery Hall, Eastern entrance



Figure 23.  
Machinery Hall, North-eastern façade

corner pavilions these effects are protruded creating porticos. There are two main entrances into the building, one facing the Administration Building on its northern side and one eastern one facing the Agricultural Building. Both of these entrances are flanked by two open towers of almost 200 feet in height, but they differ somewhat in the design of their entranceways. While the eastern entrance has a roman temple front with a pediment supported by a colonnaded portico, the northern one has instead a protruding pavilion creating a semicircular portico and canopy. The pavilion continued inward resulting in a domed niche of sorts for the centered statue of Christopher Columbus. The purpose of the building was to house the items which would show the “inventive skills” of American, and other, engineers in the “transmission of power, whether by electric, steam, hydraulic or pneumatic apparatus,”<sup>146</sup> and by this to show the cutting edge when it came to means of mechanical production and generation of power.

The insides of the structure was divided into three avenues of aisles of walkways and exhibition areas and above these three were mounted three moveable cranes which transported exhibition material and visitors the length of the corresponding naves. The whole building was on the outside covered in staff like the rest of White City, but was in actuality constructed mainly by wood and rested upon planking and trestlework foundations, but with its vaulted ceilings made with iron trusses and glass. The whole of the building resembled in many aspects a large train station with its three naves as parallel train sheds. The general style of the building can be said to be Beaux-Art, but as we have seen with the Electrical Building the architects may be accused of not being entirely consistent. The towers for example appear highly baroque with their plentiful and ornate arches, curves and statuary. Furthermore the towers are only present on two of the buildings sides, resulting in a slightly asymmetric look,

<sup>146</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft as cited in: Chaim M. Rosenberg, *America at the Fair, Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition*, (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008) p. 192

and hence not in line with the tenets of its pronounced ideals. The different design for the entrances compounds this impression and furthermore appears out of place with their more classic roman elements. In all Machinery Hall bears the impression of being a rather reluctant classicist effort from Peabody & Stearns and one could argue that their favoring of the Queen Anne style and inexperience with large scale Renaissance efforts shines through. All in all one may conclude about the two buildings that they were perhaps not entirely successful in giving a correct interpretation of the grand styles, but that both are highly artistic in their treatment of these exhibition halls, although of course the learned quibbled in their opinions of their worth. The average American visitor to be sure, who were not used to seeing buildings of this type, did not know or care to the case of their “correctness.” To him or her they were imposing, fantastical, elemental even. Owen Wister for example, a writer from Pennsylvania, wrote this of his first impression: “...before I had walked for two minutes, a bewilderment of the gloriousness of everything seized me...until my mind was dazzled to stand still...I studied nothing, looked at no detail, but merely got at the total consummate beauty and grandeur of the thing.”<sup>147</sup> This seems to sum up the experience for most visitors, one of awe, but then perhaps not by their art or nature, but by their scale, The architects had in this regard succeeded in their quest for harmony, but the question is then if they did the same with what would come after this, when the visitor would enter the buildings, as they scarcely mention the actual function of their creations, their buildings as exhibition halls, and how they would assist *that* purpose.

### **Beyond the staff**

Once inside these buildings, these exhibition halls, the visitor would to a large extent have a different experience to that of their exterior. The insides were not ornamented, here was no art, but engineering. Once one passed through the classical exterior, the visitor would come into vast modern halls, consisting of gigantic exposed iron and steel arches open wide to capture light through their glass windows, the lower supporting columns made of wood and their walls of brick and woodwork. This functional interior sheathed a large space created for the hundreds of exhibition pavilions. These kiosks were then again each designed in distinct

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<sup>147</sup> Owen Wister as quoted in: Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America, Culture & Society in the Gilded Age*, (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982) p. 218



Figure 24.  
Electricity Building, Interior view, with Edison's electrical tower



Figure 25.  
Electricity Building, Interior view

styles dependant on the exhibitor, and as the historian James Gilbert states: "Thus the visitor moving from outside in, passed through several jarring turns of architectural styles, from white painted neo-classical, to functionalist, to a jumble of eclectic kiosks, and finally, to the product itself."<sup>148</sup> In the case of the Electricity Building, these were for example, according to the official *Interesting Exhibits Catalogue*<sup>149</sup>, products such as: Westinghouse's induction coils, transformers and converters, American Bell's telephone exhibit, National Cash's electric cash register, Schuckert's search lights and Hirschmann's electromedical instruments. The building was divided into sections of A-Z and products divided into 18 groups (such as for example: Lighting by electricity, electrical measurement and telephones and telegraphs) and 62 classes. Foreign nations were given own areas and American exhibitors were arranged

according to group and class by function. The field of electricity was still in its infancy, this was the first fair to be illuminated wholly by electrical light, and the field generated widespread interest from the visitors. Here one could see thousands of new appliances, from the great inventors Thomas Edison, Nikola Tesla and Elihu Root to more modest and perhaps opportunistic efforts as the electrically powered coat-thief and pickpocket detector, to yet again harsh realities such as the newly invented electric chair.<sup>150</sup> Here the public could not only stimulate their curiosity and marvel at the scientific innovations, but also get an introduction to and learn about a technology that would (or would not) come to dominate their

<sup>148</sup> James Gilbert, *Perfect Cities, Chicago's Utopias of 1893*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991) p. 101

<sup>149</sup> W.B. Conkey Company, *Condensed Catalogue of Interesting Exhibits, with their locations in the World's Columbian Exposition*, (Chicago: W.B. Conkey Company, 1893) pp. 102-104

<sup>150</sup> Chaim M. Rosenberg, *America at the Fair, Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition*, (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008) p. 161



everyday lives in the years ahead. As with most discoveries there were still many myths and half truths circulating about the new technology, but here as H.D. Northrop would write:

The visitor was able to see not only that electricity can be useful to him in almost all phases of life, whether social or commercial, but he was brought so closely in contact with the "deadly fluid " and saw so plainly all its workings that he was able to judge for himself whether it is to be still called "deadly" and "dangerous," or whether it is only one of the giant forces of the universe, brought to its knees before the great intellect of man and made to do his bidding.<sup>151</sup>



Figure 26.  
Machinery Hall, Interior view

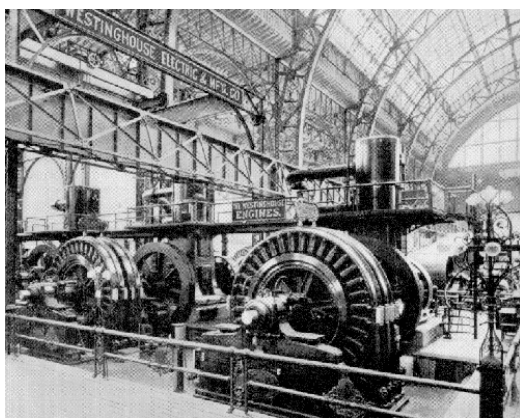


Figure 27.  
Machinery Hall, Interior view,  
Westinghouse exhibit, with Tesla generators.

This was also the case with much of the exhibited material in Machinery Hall, although there often due more to size and function than by newness. There were no "deadly fluids" here, but as according to Chaim Rosenberg, "The huge clumsy, noisy, and dangerous machines required constant attention."<sup>152</sup> One could see machines for every imaginable purpose along the hall's almost quarter mile long aisles. Thousands of instruments ranging from pumping stations and rock crushing machines to sewing machines and parlor stoves, divided into 11 groups and 87 classes, here was industrialization manifested. There seemed no end to what machines could do and the rapidity of their development, not twenty years had passed since the visitor was astonished by the Corliss steam engine at the Centennial fair in Philadelphia of 1876, but it was already an antiquity in this dawning modern age. Northrop was accordingly animated:

Machinery Hall contained within its spacious walls the most remarkable triumphs of invention. The exhibits...were studied by throngs of people constantly expressing their amazement at the achievements

<sup>151</sup> Henry Davenport Northrop, *The World's Fair, As seen in one hundred days*, (Philadelphia: Ariel Book Company, 1893) p. 243

<sup>152</sup> Chaim M. Rosenberg, op. cit. p. 201

of mechanical ingenuity. Not only was the visitor impressed with the great variety of machinery, embracing all sorts of inventions for all sorts of purposes, but the mechanical construction of it, its accuracy and perfection of detail were none the less apparent. There were machines which seemed to be able to do almost everything except talk.

Visitors then were undoubtedly impressed by the sheer numbers and sizes of many of the displays, and of the novelties and possibilities of electricity. Here it is important to keep in mind the often corporate nature of most of the exhibits in these (and most of the other) buildings. This was a jungle of articles of which the visitor not always knew the back from the front. Hence one then returns to the questions of form and function. Not to the architects, as they fulfilled their role as they saw it (even if one can question their implementations of the *grand styles*) to create an alluring and harmonious whole of locale and landscape and to promote the value of the architectural profession. But in the questions of outside versus inside, frame and content, the issue returns. There were no scientific breakthroughs at the exposition, no telephone, no daguerreotype and no monuments as the Eiffel tower and as a result the architectural program as a whole to a large extent became the lasting imprint of the exposition. Yet in its everyday function, this was a commercial trade show where inventors, businesses and artists hoped to find a market for their products. Did the presumptively different functions of container and content in practice create a discord in the grand narrative and as such not aid the exhibitor nor the visitor? This is the question for the coming chapter.

#### 4.

There are really three worlds at the Fair, utterly distinct and different. The lovely buildings, the lagoons, the broad walks, the statues and flowers and green turf, the arch of the sky, flooded with sunlight, or misty under the moon—all these are one world. Inside the many buildings is another world, intricate and wonderful; and Midway Plaisance is the third.<sup>153</sup>

When the exposition opened its doors on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 1893, people did not immediately flock to its gates, for the first month the average number of visitors was only about one third of the projected 150,000 per day. But when summer approached and word got around of the wonders of the fair, and not least of all, the scope of it, the crowds soon gathered, with numbers reaching an average of over 250,000 per day for the last two months. This chapter will deal with the visitor experience, how the fair and the selected buildings came across from the visitors' point of view. Of which narratives the architecture created and supported, of how the buildings functioned as exhibition halls and architectural frames for the works displayed inside, and how the fairgoer moved around and processed this torrent of impressions. To do this, the necessary tools will first be introduced which will be in the form of a dual approach through the use of theories and methods derived from Jacques Derrida's *The Truth in Painting* and Mieke Bal's *Narratology*, with the former used to examine the relationship between building, interior and exterior, and the latter as the link and analytical tool to the visitor experience. Naturally it is impossible to get a full and objective account of how this experience unfolded, what will thus be done, through the analytical process sketched above, is to use selected contemporary accounts (of which Hildegard Hawthorne, the supplier of the above quote is one) to illustrate and gain an insight into how it might have been like to visit White City, how their experiences, their *fabula*, interacts with and becomes part of the work's *fabula*. Of how these testimonies becomes part of the larger narrative and cultural phenomenon of the fair. The aim is in this way not to give definitive answers, but a reliable depiction of such experiences.

#### **Architecture as framing**

Now that we know their evolution and rationale, their appearance and purpose, it is time to look at these halls, these buildings for Electricity and Machinery, in metaphysical and social

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<sup>153</sup> Hildegard Hawthorne, *The Fairest of the Fair*, (Henry Altemus Company: Philadelphia, 1894) p. 15



contexts. A building is according to the Oxford dictionary “a structure with roof and walls,” but once the structure is built at a site, filled with content and inhabited by people, it becomes something else, something more. The building becomes a container for that content, interacting with their nature which again might change its own. As the borders of a painting and the gallery or museum housing it, the building becomes the *frame*. The architectural *framing* enclosing the object which combined negotiates their synergy and syncretism. This syncretistic value, opposing or not, successful or not, thus creates an environment where visitors shape their experience of the respective setting, it creates the possible narratives for how people understand their surroundings. It is time to look at these exhibition halls’ architecture as *framing* and their involvement in the creation of the fair’s narrative.

In looking at this issue of possible narratives created by frame and content, by the buildings, their architecture and their exhibited material, it is pertinent to first examine and define exactly what constitutes this frame and what it might involve. To this purpose the philosopher Jacques Derrida’s *The Truth in Painting*<sup>154</sup> will be used as a foundational work, using his basic thoughts and concepts of *framing* from the world of art in his deconstruction of Immanuel Kant’s third critique<sup>155</sup> and hence “translated” into architectural terms. Derrida here speaks of Kant’s inside and the outside and the borders of an object, and to determine the outside one must also make clear the inside, the content. This is Kant’s *Ergon*<sup>156</sup>, the work itself, for example a painting, a sculpture, or a building. It is the object proper, the intrinsic, it is something that carries out its function. For example in artistic terms, something which conveys the notion of beauty. In a footnote Kant also introduces the *Parerga*, something that is strictly speaking not part of the *ergon*, the work, but is still related to it. Kant defines it as “ornament”, something put “on top” of the work, that touches upon, but is not part of the intrinsic content, as for example a picture’s frame it is extrinsic to the work, but not separated from it, it is the border which contains and relates to the exterior, being neither inside nor outside. Kant gives other examples such as decorative columns in classical work, or clothing on sculptures. This is where Derrida’s misgivings come in, and his new definition of the *parergon*, the *frame*. How does one decide where the “ornament”, the frame, ends? As in the

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<sup>154</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987)

<sup>155</sup> *The Critique of Judgement*, (*Kritik der Urteilstkraft*) 1790. This third, and final installment of Kant’s *Critiques* is divided into two parts and here it is the first part which is the focus of Derrida’s attention, this is the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (the other being the *Critique of Teleological Judgment*.)

<sup>156</sup> From the Greek word *ergō*, which translates “to do, to work, to accomplish.” *Ergon* is here a deed (action) that carries out (completes) an *inner desire* (intension, purpose).

decorative columns of a building, are they really not part of the building? How about the windows, are they outside or inside? To answer this Derrida says, one needs a discourse, “a discourse on the frame.”<sup>157</sup> What is the frame, how large is it and what does it do? Derrida here states instead of the *parergon* that:

A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done, the fact, the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board. It is first of all the on (the) border...without being a part of it, yet without being absolutely extrinsic to it<sup>158</sup>

And further about how it operates as:

The *parergon* inscribes something which comes as an extra, exterior to the proper field, but whose transcendent exteriority comes to play, abut onto, brush against, rub, press against the limit itself and intervene in the inside only to the extent that the inside is lacking. It is lacking *in* something and it is lacking *from itself*...it has to recourse to the *parergon*, to grace, to mystery, to miracles<sup>159</sup>

As in the case of a pictures frame, it is to Derrida more than just ornament, *parergon* is more than ornament. The *parergon* stands out,

...both from the *ergon* (the work) and from the milieu, it stands out first of all like a figure on a ground. But it does not stand out in the same way as the work. The latter also stands out against a ground. But the parergonal frame stands out against two grounds [*fonds*], but with respect to each of those grounds, it merges [*se fond*] into the other. With respect to the work which can serve as a ground for it, it merges into the wall, and then gradually into the general text. With respect to the background which the general text is, it merges into the work which stands out against the general background.<sup>160</sup>

To transfer this to the subject matter in question, to the exhibited material as the *ergon* and the buildings, the architecture as the *parergon* one takes the stance that the architecture is not just the container which provides walls, a roof, and space, but something more. It is not just the frame, but actively frames and dynamically interacts with the content and the content, the

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<sup>157</sup> Jacques Derrida, op. cit. p. 45

<sup>158</sup> ibid. pp. 54-55

<sup>159</sup> ibid p. 56

<sup>160</sup> ibid. p. 61

work, as such with the outside. In this process it is not only a question of *das Ding an sich* and *der Ding für mich*, the thing in itself and the thing seen, but a composite performative effect which cannot be isolated and separated from each other. By placing material inside the container it takes on the nature of the *ergon* and is transformed by the necessary *parergon*. Necessity is not here only practical, but absolute. The *ergon* needs the *parergon* to acquire its meaning and this is how the *parergon* comes into existence:

What constitutes *parerga* is not simply their exteriority...it is the internal structures link which rivets them to the lack in the interior of the *ergon*. And this lack would be constitutive of the very unity of the *ergon*. Without this lack, the *ergon* would have no need of the *parergon*. The *ergon*'s lack is the lack of a *parergon*.<sup>161</sup>

The *ergon* is not complete without the *parergon* and through their “cooperation” a composite is created. It lacks the *frame* into which its narratives are written. The exhibited content's “lack” is here practically speaking space. It needs exhibition space, walls to separate it from material of other types, for example electrical implements from horticultural things, and a roof to protect it from the possible elements, but as stated also more than that. It is also to help shape it, define it and delineate it from the “outside.” So how does the frame(s) in question cooperate and constitute their purpose? Continuing on the work of the frame Derrida writes: “The frame labors indeed. Place of labor, structurally bordered origin of surplus value, i.e., overflowed on these two borders by what it overflows, it gives indeed. Like wood. It creaks and cracks, breaks down and dislocates even as it cooperates in the production of the product, overflows it and is deduc(t)ed from it. It never lets itself be simply exposed.”<sup>162</sup> Following this line of thought the *parergon* is an organic appendix, and as the *ergon*; not feasible to be seen by itself.<sup>163</sup> After covering the practicalities, how does the frames in question, the Electricity building and Machinery hall, labor for their content? How do they fulfill their roles as *parerga*? In order to analyze this one must first look at the possible narratives they provide for the beholder, the fairgoer. One must first know how the visitors experienced these surroundings and what they might have taken from them. One must know to which forms of

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<sup>161</sup> *ibid.* pp. 59-60

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.* p. 75

<sup>163</sup> Naturally this could be approached from an alternative angle as well, one could for example propose that: If *ergon* is something that does, something that “works”, for example a thing of beauty, could the architecture then not also be the *ergon* and its context, and hence its contents, the *parergon*? And further: How does two *erga*, work as *parerga* for each other? This might lead to a fascinating discussion, but for the sake of clarity will not be pursued here, and arguably the results would be the same if using the same tools of analysis.

“grace, mystery and miracles” they might support. To do this though, one also needs a way of looking at these experiences, these narratives, a method of analysis which must first be grasped before proceeding further.

## Narratives

When looking at this, the narratives of the architectural style and the contents of the exhibitions inside, from our contemporary viewpoint thoughts of total schizophrenia will most likely manifest themselves. Why did they use this style to promote the character, innovation and power of America when they had all the progress and talent of the Loop and elsewhere to pick from? Hopefully this question has been answered in previous chapters, but here still lies the challenge now at hand, how to analyze this *story* through the eyes of someone who read the original text and not some abridged copy? This act of analysis, to examine the visitors’ impressions of the *ergon* and the *parergon*, the work, the frame and the whole, its *energeia*<sup>164</sup>, will be done through the use of cultural theorist and critic Mieke Bal’s structuralist approach of *narratology*.<sup>165</sup> In other words, before we can deconstruct, we must construct, re-construct. Bal has in the formation of this theory and method herself grappled with numerous concepts and analytical tools, Derrida included, where here the concept of framing remains central, and Bal’s method will be most useful here as a coherent tool of ordering the possible messages and markers of the buildings’ narrative, and then look at how these might affect the frame, the *parergon* and the partaker. In this theory of narrative and how it functions, Bal does not limit herself to the study of the telling of a tale, but include all aspects of its production, its participants and ways of unfolding. Neither does she limit the scope of her study and the theory of narratology to written or verbal accounts, but includes the world of naturalia and artificialia. Bal states: “Things, called objects for a good reason, appear to be the most “pure” form of objectivity. So examining the question of the inherent fictionality of all narratives can as well begin here...Objects as subjectivized elements in a narrative.”<sup>166</sup> The narratological application is then almost limitless and may be used in all cases where this can be found, be it of an object, a building, an area, a person or an actual written or oral account. In this instant

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<sup>164</sup> From *ergon*, meaning “being-at-work” and an entity’s “is-at-work-ness”

<sup>165</sup> Taken from the book of the same name: Mieke Bal, *Narratology, Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Third Edition, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985/2009)

<sup>166</sup> Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, edited by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, (London: Reaktion Books, 1994) p. 99

the aim will be to investigate the interplay between the buildings, the objects and the people interacting with them. Which narratives are here created? Where do you then begin? The museologist Susan Pearce writes that:

The emotional relationship of projection and internalization which we have with objects seems to belong with our very earliest experience and (probably therefore) remains important to us all our lives. Equally, this line of thought brings us back to the intrinsic link between our understanding of our bodies and the imaginative construction of the material world.<sup>167</sup>

Logically we will not in this case start at infancy, but the quote is telling for the often taken for granted role of our own physicality in the way we inhabit and understand our surroundings. Did the great tableau excite the emotions Van Brunt et al. envisioned? To measure the fictionality one must start with the people. One must examine who they are in order to investigate their affections, but as Bal states: "...it is only once we know how a text is structured that the reader's share – and responsibility – for acting within those constraints can be clearly assessed."<sup>168</sup> This is done through the study of narratology. Narratology then, Bal says, "is the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that "tell a story."<sup>169</sup> It is a way of looking at what something communicates, how it is intended, how it is received and what it produces. To put this in motion, to analyze something's narrative, Bal sketches a skeleton framework of three layers: Text, story and fabula, and defines these components as:

*A narrative text* is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee ("tells" the reader) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. *A story* is the content of that text, and produces a particular manifestation, inflection and "coloring" of a fabula; the fabula is presented in a certain manner. *A fabula* is a series of logically or chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors.<sup>170</sup>

Onto these layers, these main parts, exists many minor parts as well, in this work only the ones pertinent to it will be named and used. This is especially the case with the first layer *text*,

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<sup>167</sup> As cited in: Mieke Bal, *Telling Objects...* p. 102

<sup>168</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology, Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Third Edition, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985/2009) p. 13

<sup>169</sup> *ibid.* p. 3

<sup>170</sup> *ibid.* p. 5

as the content here refers mainly to textual matters in the literal sense. For a full account one is referred to Bal's original work.

- *Text*

"A narrative text is a text in which a narrative agent tells a story" The content(s) of this text is as mentioned, the *story*, but before the content one must establish who the "narrative agent" is, and in this regard this is not the author or creator of the text, but the subject and function of the text. The narrator in this text is not the architect, but the architecture, not van Brunt & Howe or Peabody & Stearns, not even Burnham, but the buildings of Electricity and Machinery and White City. Bal further describes several different forms and types of narration one of which she calls "levels of narration," this is the way something is narrated through signage. This could for example be emotive language use, the use of exclamation marks or the grammatical construct of a sentence. Translated into the terms of the subject matter this would be the different architectural and ornamental features used, for example the placement of the entrances, the statue of Benjamin Franklin or the color of the buildings. This tells us something of their tone, inflection and emphasis. Bal distinguishes also between what she calls "primary" and "embedded" texts "seen as the dependence of a subordinate clause to a main clause."<sup>171</sup> The narrative text still constitutes a whole, but that there might exist different levels of primacy which may or may not relate to their significance. In our case White City is the primary text and the respective buildings embedded ones, even though they in this case are the ones in the limelight. Further this might also entail levels of primary fabula in relation to embedded text and embedded fabula, but this will be examined in the paragraph on the matter.

- *Story*

"If one regards the text primarily as the product of the use of a medium, and the fabula primarily as the product of imagination, the story could be regarded as the result of an ordering."<sup>172</sup> The *story* is as stated the content and more specifically "how it comes across to a reader in a certain manner."<sup>173</sup> It is the message, the tales told and the way they are told. In our case of architecture it would be the stories created by styles and forms of White City and

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<sup>171</sup> *ibid.* p. 57

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.* p. 75

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.*

how they are presented to the visitor. Inhere Bal states that there are several important factors to take into consideration, one of them being “time.” By time, Bal means the temporality of an event, a *story*. In this case that would entail both the time taken to experience the grounds and the time frame in which they exist, and the temporal notions they entertain. For example, the style of architecture used, triggers in many thoughts of history and timelessness, but on the other hand, we know that these structures are highly temporary, and that yet again, their interiors are highly contemporary. This is related to the question of “sequential ordering,” the sequence of things, for example that the outside of a building must necessarily be experienced before the inside, and further the aspect of “space.” Bal states about this that: “In the story, where space is connected to the characters who “live” it, the primary aspect of space is the way characters bring their senses to bear on space...especially...sight, hearing and touch.”<sup>174</sup> This space is the physical *frame* where one comes back to the Derridian *parergon* as the framing for the story, as the space in which the story takes place, with Bal stating that: “...the space in which the characters are situated, or precisely not situated, is regarded as the frame,”<sup>175</sup> that “...the boundary which delimits the frame can be heavily invested with meaning” and that this frame and the space within it can be either described as “steady” or “dynamic,” dependant on which meaning it is to be invested with, on how it is experienced by the characters. Attached here is also the mentioned underlying architectural theory of for instance Viollet-le-Duc, Semper and Alberti.<sup>176</sup> Related to our subject matter of White City and the Electricity building and Machinery Hall, this will entail looking at how visitors physically used the grounds and buildings, how they moved around and how they were affected by their surroundings. And further how this might in return affect the buildings and the contents themselves. One here reaches the question of the relationship between the “topos,” the expectation, the “focalization,” the vision and perspective which Bal describes as “the relation between the vision and that which is “seen,” perceived,”<sup>177</sup> and what is actually

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<sup>174</sup> *ibid.* p. 136

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.* pp. 136, 137, 139

<sup>176</sup> One could add to the recounted with a mention of Semper’s idea of architecture as being inherently theatrical and describing a building’s façade in textile terms as “cladding,” “dressing” or “masking” (*bekleidung*), as written on by for example Harry Francis Mallgrave in his: *Gottfried Semper, Architect of the nineteenth century*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996) That a true artistic exterior should through architectural dressing “camouflage the material in a physical sense” and animate form “with symbolic or ideal content” pp. 300,368. Semper states according to this to: “which the viewing of a work of art makes one forget the means and the material with which and by which it exists, how it has an effect and as form becomes self-sufficient.” p. 301. Semper warned though that this “dressing”, this “mask”, could not be a false one in itself or to that which was behind, the “mask,” Mallgrave states, must not be “dissimulative.” p. 303

<sup>177</sup> Mieke Bal, *op. cit.* pp. 145-146

there. “Focalization” is in Bal’s method a central term, and is the link between the *text* and the *fabula*, it is the study of relationships of aspects and the point of view of elements. In this regard it will be the study of the vision of the text, the architecture, which then also includes its *purpose(s)*, what is there and the expectations that creates and how the characters, the visitors, “sees” that. In other words, are the *story* and the *fabula* in concord with the *text*’s purpose?

#### -*Fabula*

All of the priors of *text* and *story* are in terms of the reader, or visitor, experience, linked to the *fabula*. The *fabula* is how the “events” presented or caused by the *text* and *story* are understood and influence the “actors.” Bal explains about the *fabula* that:

The material that constitutes the fabula can be divided into “fixed” and “changeable” elements – objects, on the one hand, and processes on the other. *Elements* may be understood as not only the actors who are more or less stable in most fabulas, but also as locations and things. *Processes* are the changes that occur in, with, through, and among the objects; in other words, the events. The word *process* emphasizes the ideas of development, succession, alteration, and interrelation among the elements. Both sorts of elements – objects and processes – are indispensable for the construction of a fabula. They cannot operate without one another.<sup>178</sup>

We see here a complement to, and continuation of the relations between the *ergon* and *parergon*, which are here part of the “elements” as objects, but not contained to their relationship and influence on each other, but also to the wider contexts, as part of the “processes.” The event of architecture is here both fixed and changeable as it interacts with the actors. Bal defines her use of the term events as “the transition from one state to another state, caused or experienced by actors.”<sup>179</sup> Establishing the events are to Bal the beginning of a *fabula* analysis; in our instance the answer is as it has been all along, it is the architecture and the exhibitions, but now populated by actors. Bal calls this a “change” which makes it an “event,” and here the *fabula* develops. According to Aristotle<sup>180</sup> one then has three distinct phases in every *fabula*: The -possibility, which one could in this case also call expectation, the -event, or realization, the carrying out of the experience and the -conclusion, the results of the two former. What are the immediate expectations of the architecture, what is the perceived

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<sup>178</sup> *ibid.* p. 189

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> As cited in: *ibid.* p. 196



reality of it and what are the results of this? These phases are naturally dependant on the actors which one must also define and select. In our case the actors will be the visitors to the fairgrounds and to the exhibition halls, but more particularly they will be the American visitors, with European ones relegated to the sidelines as observers. The actors experiences will be looked at in light of the above mentioned, but also in terms of as subject and object; who are they, and what do they aim to get out of their visit. Are the aspirations the same for rural visitors from the prairie hinterlands as those of a New England intellectual or a Chicago businessman? Their experiences might hence be different, as could their experience of the primary elements of the grounds versus the embedded ones of the buildings. Collated, this will affect the *fabula*.

### Visiting White City

Time is lost here. You glance at the fountain - and lo! an hour has gone by. You turn and look down the Lagoon, and the ringing of the chimes in Machinery Hall reminds you dreamily that the morning has passed, and it is noon. But it matters not. You feel with a sumptuous delight that an hour, a day, a week, are unmeaning terms to you here; you count by shadows on the walls, by the rhythm of the fountain, by the sweet silences of the buildings.<sup>181</sup>

In this quote by the then young author Hildegarde Hawthorne<sup>182</sup> the sights and sentiments of White City on a hot summer day are vividly evoked. Time flies by in this seemingly Elysian<sup>183</sup> playground, and is it not all eternal and halcyon. Miss Hawthorne continues her description from the viewpoint of one of the gondolas in the Grand Basin:

I step into a blue and silver one, and lean back luxuriously against the cushions, letting one hand hang over the side, that the rippling water may occasionally touch it. I feel dreamily happy, and am ready for anything beautiful...Ever and anon we pass other gondolas, and I feel a sort of bond between the people in them and myself. For are they not also in Dreamland with me, removed by countless ages from the rest of the world?<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Hildegarde Hawthorne, op. cit. pp. 4-5

<sup>182</sup> 1871 – 1952, she mainly wrote children's books and poetry. She was the granddaughter of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

<sup>183</sup> From the Greek word "Ēlýsion," pertaining to "Elysium" a place, or state, in the afterlife, separated from the netherworld of Hades. In Roman mythology it becomes an opposite to Tartarus where sinful souls go, and in Christian literature it increasingly takes on the allusions of Paradise.

<sup>184</sup> Hildegarde Hawthorne, op. cit. pp. 6, 10



Figure 28.  
The Grand Basin with gondola facing the northern canal and lagoon. With The Electricity Building on the left, Manufacturers on the right and The Palace of Fine arts in the background

As she meanders the grounds she feels herself transported to a timeless otherworldly place, and even perhaps state. But not all is perfect as Hawthorne utters: “And now a little electric launch, slipping noiselessly by us shatters the image.”<sup>185</sup> Invariably there slips in a discontinuity, a reminder that this is not Elysium after all. The grounds of White City are after all not as “silent” as the style of the buildings suggests and Hawthorne

further states: “Yet even here, there are some things which are not perfect. Perhaps it is as well that this should be so, for it reminds you that the work has been really done by man after all, and has not been conjured out of the white clouds by the music of some angel's voice.”<sup>186</sup> One of these things which are “not perfect” are some of the men themselves, some of the other visitors:

When the band is playing in the plaza before the Administration Building, the benches are generally filled with people... They are probably the same variety of humanity which, in country places, builds ugly little houses facing a dusty highway, while behind, and additionally hidden by a huge pile of firewood, lies a glorious view of sky and water and golden fields... You see people you would scarcely expect to find in such a place. Here, leaning against the balustrade which encircles the fountain, his head bent back, staring up at the rounded curve of the Administration's dome, is an old farmer, in a rusty black suit, with a collarless shirt and a broad-brimmed hat. His face is struggling to express an intricacy of new emotions, but succeeds only in looking dazed... Beside you is an unmistakable Irish cook. She is examining earnestly the mermaids of the fountain. Presently, turning toward you, she murmurs in an awed voice, " Is it craters like them that be in the say? Howly Mother of God, but what a wonderful place it is! Women wid tails like the fishes!" And muttering exclamations of wonder and delight, she passes on.<sup>187</sup>

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.* p. 7

<sup>186</sup> *ibid.* p. 5

<sup>187</sup> *ibid.* pp. 13-14

This is a fair, this is a spectacle, and it is available to people from all walks of life, and then especially to the working and middle classes, with its late night and weekend opening hours. Hawthorne bemoans the crowds of people she feels are out of place, out of their depth, and who fail to sufficiently contextualize their surroundings. Yet, their feelings and reactions are the same as hers, even if they might not be able to put such lofty words to them. She writes of their dazed looks through “an intricacy of new emotions” and “exclamations of wonder and delight.” They are the same as hers, even if they might not know why. They are the same because they are both reading the same *text* and *story*.

### *-Text*

As stated the *text* is here the buildings and the arrangement of White City, and the narrative agent, the narrator, of that text is the architecture. This would be the buildings visual appearance, contents and locations, which has been described extensively in previous chapters. Inhere one also have different “levels of narration,” naturally including their style, which is the top level. This will be dealt with in depth as part of the *story*, but one could mention others as for example the color scheme deployed. The most noticeable aspect here is of course the to a large extent absence of color in the uniformly white execution of all but one of the main buildings. The usage of the same monochrome was done to maximize the effect of the architecture and give it sense of unity. In practice this use of white paint,<sup>188</sup> on the already bland staff, gives the impression that there is no coloring, that what one sees are bare materials, bare stone. In this instance, with the hue of white used, it resembles marble, and more especially Greek or Italian marble. The result at the time was a compounded effect of real architecture, of ancient architecture as seen in paintings, photographs and described in countless written accounts. Although one has later found that the stones of classicism were often recipients of extensive polychromatic treatment, it was at the time synonymous with whiteness (as it is now). Architectural whiteness was thus the perceived color of history, of a timeless tradition and hence purity as related to an almost styleless style. The unbroken usage of this chromaticity in this way gives the *text* a distinct tint of phantasmagoria even before examining the *story*. Arnold Lewis writes on the matter that:

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<sup>188</sup> For a good account of the use of white in architecture, and its implementation and inspiration, see: Mark Wrigley's *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, (MIT Press: Cambridge MA, 2001)

The first impression...was a profoundly optical experience. The eyes of visitors reported what their minds resisted – the presence of an ancient city in contemporary times. Not alone Friedrich Dernburg admitted he was afraid to close his eyes for fear that when he opened them, “all will disappear as in a dream.”<sup>189</sup>

Yet staring to long was also difficult because: “Painted white, their facades glistened in the sun. Reflected light was so bright visitors complained they could not stare for long.”<sup>190</sup> This only increased the effect of illusion, the buildings also mirrored in the rippling waters and against the endless horizon of Lake Michigan, leading to an impression like Dernburg’s; blink, and it would all prove a mirage.

### *-Story*

The story as mentioned then already bears a significant hue before even looking at it, and parts of this seems strengthened when appraising the architectural narrative. What does this architecture tell the reader? A building, or a group of buildings, does by their appearance most often signify something to the beholder towards their purpose and relation to the space and time they occupy. A Christian cathedral tells of its “connection” with the heavens and its central position in the society in which it was built, a house or apartment block says something about its dwellers and a business’ offices about their success. Neoclassical and beaux-art architecture of these dimensions are no different, but their *story* would have differed between the ones experiencing them. To the visitor from Europe, or even the older cities of the east, this type of architecture would have been familiar. To the European they trigger thoughts of both their origins and their newer incarnations such as in cathedrals, palaces and the monumental public architecture of libraries, theatres, music halls, train stations and museums. To the easterners of particularly Boston and New York examples of the latter category would have been seen in the decade prior to the Chicago fair. To this group we could consider Hildegard Hawthorne an example; she is well versed in the cultural connotations of the styles and their history, writing for example that: “Yonder, over by the Peristyle, in the angles of the wings...are two little Greek Vestal temples.”<sup>191</sup> She shows that she is familiar with the genre and jargon, but still she is overwhelmed by their effect. She knows these

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<sup>189</sup> Arnold Lewis, *An early encounter with tomorrow, Europeans, Chicago’s Loop and The World’s Columbian Exposition*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997) p. 179

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> Hildegard Hawthorne, *op. cit.* p. 4



Figure 29.  
The Grand Basin: MacMonnies Fountain with its Columbia statue in the foreground and statue of the Republic and Peristyle in the background.



Figure 30.  
Bridge over south canal between Agriculture Building and Machinery Hall.

shapes, these figures, this style, she has seen and lived them before and she has entered their archways, yet somehow this is different. When describing her surroundings in the introduction to her account she writes of the spirit of the place: "...throned high on a triumphal chair in the centre, is the Spirit of the Fair - Columbia...her head is proudly lifted, as who should say to the Old World entering at her gates, "Behold what I have done!"",<sup>192</sup> This is no normal place, and not only for the extraordinary sizes of the structures, but for the way of the structures. For Hawthorne, this place has meaning other than, and beyond its material purpose. "Behold what I have done!" This does not pertain to the innovations on display inside the buildings, but to the way they have been built, their style. The style to Hawthorne here tells a story of time and space. Time in the sense that they naturally refer back to their ancient roots of Greece, Rome, and

later Europe in general, to a place where such a style and monumentality were reserved for the rulers and the deities (or both at once), and later as stated of massive public works. But the style in this instance also represents to Hawthorne a time, a place, outside of time, outside of the conventional realm. When entering the Court of Honor in particular, you are entering the past, the present, the future and a dreamscape all at once, a space devoid of mundane matters. In a speech held at the Court of Honor, and bearing the same name, this notion is well illustrated. The speech is structured as a sermon and repeatedly references scripture. The

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.* pp. 3-4

references here are to no other than the *Book of Revelation*, and more precisely to Revelation 4 where heaven and the throne of God are revealed. The author of the speech, or sermon, uses the parts of the Court of Honor as “bodily” incarnations of the different verses in Rev. 4. Systematically one by one, the verses 1 to 11, are all given representations at the court. Some of them read as follows:

v. 1.

“After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.”

All who entered the Court of Honor...saw this door opened in heaven.<sup>193</sup>

The Court is here used as a direct allegory for heaven and entering it was like looking through St. Peter’s doorway and seeing God’s court mirrored.

v.7.

“And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.”

The first beast like a lion is the Manufactures Building...The second beast like a calf is the Agricultural Building...The third beast with a face of a man, is the Machinery hall, where the faculties of intelligence are especially required. The fourth beast like a flying eagle is the Electricity Building, in which the United States, whose symbol is the eagle, has achieved the highest distinction.

The allegory is here taken further, letting the different buildings around the throne, represented by the Administration Building, take on the virtues of the Christian tetramorph. Machinery is given to represent Matthew and the link between the human faculties and Christ, evoking in this way thoughts of the machine in the garden<sup>194</sup>, man as masters and shepherds of the earth. Electricity is then the step further, as John, the figure of the skies, man as masters of that “deadly fluid,” the invisible forces of nature.

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<sup>193</sup> “The Court of Honor,” speech, or sermon, given by an unknown author. From the Daniel H. Burnham Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago, Accession nr. 1943.1, Series VI, Box 60, Folder 60.67

<sup>194</sup> Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964)

v. 9.

“And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,”

These four architectural dreams show the glory of truth, the honour of life and the thanks of love, due to that power which created and must preserve such beauty, and which is infinite and eternal.

v. 10.

“The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,”

The glory of the scene causes the 24 elders, the states, the people, to appreciate, to honour, to worship this Unity of purpose, this One power that brought so much of the ideal before them, causing them to look to preservation of this for all, that all may see, and crowning this purpose with understanding and perception of its higher inner meaning.

In these two “verses” the scene of the Court of Honor and its buildings transcend physical representations and allegorical meaning to take on their own “higher inner meaning.” The author does not speak to the exact substance of this “meaning”, but again one here returns to the purpose of “unity” and to an “ideal.” The *story* is then fiction, fantastical symbolism of an alternative world, of Altruria, of an enlightened paradise. In this *story* the buildings are not exhibition halls, but “architectural dreams” to be worshipped and to remind the visitor of all that is “infinite and eternal.” One then reaches a point where one may ask the question if this *story*, this story of a timeless architectural dreamscape, is not contrary, or at least problematic, to the *story* of the exhibited content and the practical purpose of the fair itself? If the *purpose* to create ... “that rest, grace and harmony, which are needed as a compensation for materialism...so that some elements of “sweetness and light” may be brought forward to counterbalance the boastful Philistinism of our times,”<sup>195</sup> does not in fact hinder, or at the very least overshadow the other facets of the fair. If in this way the *frame* does not indeed “let itself be simply exposed,” and the *ergon*’s, the contents’, lack also exposed, resisted by its *parergon*.

The *story* of this part, of the insides of the buildings, is one of commerce and innovation. By the “sequential ordering” of the *text* one must naturally experience the buildings from the outside before entering them, and when this occurs one also enter another “time” and another

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<sup>195</sup> Henry Van Brunt, *Architecture and Society, Selected Essays of Henry Van Brunt*, (Cambridge, Ma.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969) pp. 235 -36

“space”. When entering the buildings the actors shift to occupy and experience another event different to the one of the outside. Time and sense of place changes and one goes from a space of extensive dreams devoid of time to one unequivocally contemporary and fixed. The *story* then changes accordingly, from fiction to fact. In a text accompanying a McAllister Lantern slide presentation R.E.A. Dorr describes the interior of the Electricity building:

What art can depict these marvels...The subtle might and delicate potentiality of electricity were here displayed in all their known forms. The telegraph and the telephone, the phonograph and the microphone, the dish-washers and the boot-blackening appliances, cooking and heating apparatus, and everything to which electricity has been applied were exhibited. Beyond them all in visible impressiveness were the wonders of electric light of every color and design.<sup>196</sup>

As opposed to the outer architecture, this is not art, this is industry. Here the *story* is about power, material and numbers, yet when reading this description it is evident that even here the “language” of the outside is still persistent. In reality, in the terms of its creators, the actual architecture here is not art, this would be deemed merely engineering. As mentioned earlier it is purely about the creation of space which is done through the brazen use of timber, iron, steel and glass. There is no attempt to hide the constructional realities of the structures, all is laid bare. Moreover there is no attempt or effort in ornamentation other than what the different pavilions themselves display. For example, under the heading “ornamental features” in the chapter devoted to Machinery Hall in Northrop’s *The World’s Fair, As seen in one hundred days*, the mentions are of an Ice Grotto above a water tank for the pump exhibit, a paper mill and of printing and lithograph presses.<sup>197</sup> Here again then reverberates Burnham’s distinction between *dignity* and expression, but now transposed to the separation of Outside and inside. Great effort was put in to create the *dignified* facades, but on the inside responsibility was seemingly surrendered and *expression* let loose. Once inside then one could easily mistake one building from the other if one did not look at, or were not familiar with, the somewhat different layouts of the buildings or the exhibition contents. Further the aspects of the contents, being exhibitions created by different companies and countries also sat the insides apart from the outside. Where the grounds and the framing architecture was devised as

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<sup>196</sup> T.H. McAllister, *McAllister’s series of “LANTERN LECTURES.” The Columbian Exposition, A visit to the world’s fair, Chicago, illustrated by Sixty-one Photographic Lantern Slides, accompanied with an original descriptive lecture by R. E. A. Dorr, Esq.*, (New York: T.H. McAllister, 1893) p. 30

<sup>197</sup> Henry Davenport Northrop, *The World’s Fair, As seen in one hundred days*, (Philadelphia: Ariel Book Company, 1893) p. 236



a unity of expression and purpose the plethora of exhibition pavilions saw endless variety in both these aspects, all with their own *expressions*. These after all were competing businesses and competing countries all vying for the visitor and potential customer or investor's attention. This world of exhibitions required concentration and patience, but as shown by Dorr's quote, many were still seemingly dazed by the scenes of the grounds. Contrasted with the orderly and uniform White City, the exhibition halls were a hodgepodge of impressions, of color, sound and materiality. Hawthorne describes an almost dizzying visit to the Electricity building:

Up there in the gallery a sentence flashes out, as if written by an unseen hand, in letters of white fire; it vanishes as suddenly, and in its place gleams forth a name in vivid blue. Yonder revolves a great crystal globe, and now the western, now the eastern hemisphere is alighted. A tri-colored serpent of light wriggles up a pillar, separates at the top into three zig-zags of red, white and blue lightning, which find their way to as many spinning spheres, in which they glow and vanish....It is a wilderness of brilliance, humming and murmuring with invisible force...It is impossible to separate and analyze the radiant and sparkling splendors that rain upon me from every side.<sup>198</sup>

Entering the halls could, just as the outside, be an overwhelming sensation on the senses, but differ greatly in how "the way characters bring their senses to bear on space"<sup>199</sup> How did the visitors experience and interact with this frame and contained space? The answer seems in many cases to be that they to a large extent simply did not. They visited the halls sure, wandered around in them yes, but that the types of objects, the numbers of them, and the assault of impressions was often too scientific, too many, too much to explore in detail. A good account of such a visitor experience comes from the naturalist writer Theodore Dreiser, a native of the Midwest, who here in his early career was working as a reporter for newspapers in Chicago and St. Louis. On assignment from the "St. Louis Republic" Dreiser was to accompany twenty school teachers on a two week visit to the fair and write about their experiences, as he would later write of his own in the autobiography *Newspaper days*:

This first day, as so many of the others that followed, was spent in wandering about the Fair from building to building and exhibit to exhibit, the general exterior effect of the buildings far outrivaling in appeal, for me at least, anything which the interiors had to offer. The latter were astounding enough as to size and fascinating enough as to particular exhibits, where one could understand them, educational

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<sup>198</sup> Hildegard Hawthorne, op. cit. pp. 285-286

<sup>199</sup> Mieke Bal, op. cit. p. 136

and broadening to a degree; but since machinery, electricity, textiles, and some phases of agriculture and architecture were in the main Greek to me, only the simpler and more surfacy things appealed... All that enourmous display like that in the Machinery Hall had to say to me was – that I knew nothing about machinery and never would. Ditto electricity. Ditto textiles, mining, mineralogy and the like.<sup>200</sup>

Dreiser visits the buildings and looks at the exhibits, but not out of interest or enjoyment, but out of duty and inevitability. The interior to Dreiser did not have the appealing effect of the grounds and merely reminded him of his own “shortcomings.” Naturally the architecture could not change the interests or knowledge of its visitors, or as Dreiser put it, his inability “to comprehend abstrusities” which would do nothing but give him a “profound headache.”<sup>201</sup> Architecture cannot change the proclivities of humans, but it may aid him; Bal states that the *story*, and the “space” where it takes place, and where the “...characters are situated, or precisely not situated, is regarded as the frame,” and that “...the boundary which delimits the frame can be heavily invested with meaning”<sup>202</sup> The *frame*, the *parergon* might not be able change Dreiser’s understanding of machinery and electricity, but what it could do is to prepare him and aid him in his expectations and cover the “lack” of the *ergon*. Derrida writes about it that it is: “The self-protection-of-the-work, of *energeia* which becomes *ergon* only as (from) *parergon*.” The *parergon* exists because of the lack of the *ergon*, but the *ergon* also becomes itself, its whole because of the help of this lack, the help of the *parergon*. This “lack” and the *parergon* is “not against free and full and pure and unfetted energy (pure act and total presence of *energeia*, the Aristotelian prime mover) but against what is lacking in it”<sup>203</sup> which is the frame. Having done this, providing this frame, the *parergon*’s task is to ensure that “only a certain practice of theoretical fiction can work against”<sup>204</sup> it. This is where Bal’s concept of *focalization* comes into play, the relation between Derrida’s possible fiction, the expectation, in Bal’s words the *topos*, and what is actually there. *Focalization* is the relationship between the vision of what is seen, of what is on the borders perceived, and the reality of what is in fact there. Fiction – vision – fact.

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<sup>200</sup> Theodore Dreiser, *Newspaper Days*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) p. 312, originally published in 1922 in an expurgated form under the name *A story about myself* and the re-issued in 1931 as *Newspaper days*, unexpurgated.

<sup>201</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> Mieke Bal, *op. cit.* pp. 136, 137,

<sup>203</sup> Jacques Derrida, *op. cit.* p. 80

<sup>204</sup> *ibid.* P. 81

*-Fabula*

With the act of *focalization*, with the potentialities of vision, we enter the world of the *fabula*. When Theodore Dreiser is reluctant to enter the buildings it does not just say something about him, that the hard sciences is not his strong suit, but also something about the buildings themselves. Dreiser continues his assessment of visiting the fair by eliciting:

When it came to the surfaces and forms of things...these, talked to me in another language, giving rise to thoughts of a deep and serious character...The moment I ceased attempting to grasp the details of these very intricate displays and turned my eyes to the general scene, then, and not until then, was I happy and at rest...Just to wander and gaze, to think of something and feel beauty – the arch lines of the buildings themselves...these offered the facts for a philosophy of beauty.<sup>205</sup>

What has occurred here for Dreiser are the problems between vision, his thoughts of the buildings, and the reality confronting him once he enters. Having experienced them from the outside he finds that they do not offer him anything when he enters. The focalization for Dreiser is shattered, which gives him no other respite than to exit the building and return to his first “vision.” He has found that the reality does not correspond with the fiction and he prefers the fiction, he prefers the illusion. What exactly is it that happens here, what type of “event” is it that takes place here for Dreiser? As mentioned, an “event” in Bal’s theoretical framework is the results of “processes,” the “changes that occur in, with, through, and among the objects.”<sup>206</sup> The “event” and changes that transpire here is the architecture’s effect on its insides content as mediated by the visitor’s *fabula*. To examine this “event” in the eyes of Dreiser, and visitors in general, one must then look at three elements: The expectation, the realization and the conclusion. In this case the expectation is how the visitor reads the *story* of the building’s *text*, its architecture, before venturing further. The *story* is, as posited earlier, to a large degree driven by aspects of ephemerality and illusion. Illusions of space, time and stone. The art historian Ernst Gombrich has written at length on the conditions of illusion in art, stating for example on the matter that:

What we called mental set may be precisely that state of readiness to start projecting, to thrust out the tentacles of phantom colours and the phantom images which always flicker around our perceptions. And what we call “reading” an image may perhaps be better described as testing it for potentialities, trying

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<sup>205</sup> Theodore Dreiser, op. cit. p. 313

<sup>206</sup> Mieke Bal, op. cit. p. 189

out what fits...Once a projection, a reading, finds anchorage in the image in front of us, it becomes much more difficult to detach it.<sup>207</sup>

This could just as well be stated about the conditions of expectation and to the visitor experiences of Dreiser and others. Visitors, from whatever fold, were surprised at what they encountered and upon seeing White City and the buildings of for example Electricity and Machinery, their minds racing to find the correct place and connotations for it all, to make it fit with something already flickering around their own perceptions. And in the act of this type of “projecting” they would settle on elements of the *story*, whether as tantamount to *Revelations*, Elysium, Altruria or time travel. Whatever their background, here was something positively surreal, either for the alienness of the classical architecture or for the out of place nature of it. The historian Henry Adams described it in this way: “Here was a breach of continuity – a rupture in historical sequence! Was it real, or only apparent? One’s personal universe hung on the answer.”<sup>208</sup> The answer seemed to be that they indeed were real, but not the reality of exhibition halls, but the reality of an illusion, of scenery in a dream. One returns again to Van Brunt’s statement of intent to create ... “that rest, grace and harmony, which are needed as a compensation for materialism...so that some elements of “sweetness and light” may be brought forward to counterbalance the boastful Philistinism of our times.”<sup>209</sup> He and his associates succeeded, but at the cost of the realization that would bring about in the visitors. This realization was that there indeed was something inside these “architectural screens” but that the expectations created by the *story* rendered it in lesser terms. As Dreiser, many ended up being reluctant to enter the buildings at all with one observer exclaiming that: “I do not care to know what these buildings contained. It displeases me to think that they had any useful purpose – or any purpose whatever.”<sup>210</sup> Naturally though, most people did of course venture into the buildings and when they did, their expectations, their “focalization” was shattered, their vision did not correspond to what they saw once inside. This event can be correlated to Bal’s explanation to the problems of the aspects of memories. Bal writes that:

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<sup>207</sup> Ernst Gombrich’s *Art and Illusion, a study in the psychology of pictorial representation* (London: Phaidon, 1960) pp. 190-191

<sup>208</sup> Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 (first published 1918)) p. 286

<sup>209</sup> Henry Van Brunt, *Architecture and Society, Selected Essays of Henry Van Brunt*, (Cambridge, Ma.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969) pp. 235 -36

<sup>210</sup> As quoted in: Arnold Lewis, op. cit. p. 180

Memory is an act of “vision” of the past, but as an act, situated in the present of the memory. It is often a narrative act: loose elements come to cohere into a story... But as is well known, memories are unreliable – in relation to the fabula – and when put into words, they are rhetorically overworked... Hence the “story” the person remembers is not identical to the one she experienced. This discrepancy becomes traumatic... The events can be so incongruous that no fabula can be “recognized” as “logical”... At the later time of remembrance the subject cannot shape a story out of them. The two elements fail to provide a framework for a meaningful act of focalization.<sup>211</sup>

In this case the act of seeing the architecture, the buildings, is reminiscent of that of a memory. The action itself and the place are of the present, but the time and space are of the past, as if a memory, or comparatively, a dream. The vision, in relation to reality, becomes unreliable, the expectations of the *story* do not correspond with the experience of the realization and hence the conclusion becomes “traumatic,” leading to the failure of providing “a framework for a meaningful act of focalization.” In this moment the *parergon* is separated from the *ergon* (if such a thing is possible, but at the very least changes the meaning of the *ergon*). Derrida writes:

Don't forget, nonetheless, that the *content*, the *object* of this theoretical fiction (the free energy of the originary process, its pure productivity) is metaphysics, onto-theology itself. The practice of fiction always runs the risk of believing in it or having us believe in it. The *practice* of fiction must therefore guard against having metaphysical truth palmed off on it once again under the label of fiction. There is fiction and fiction. Necessity here of the angle – diagonality – where things work and play and give... everything will flower at the edge of a deconsecrated tomb.<sup>212</sup>

The *practice* of fiction in the *parergon* has in this instance done exactly this, surrendered itself to another theoretical fiction than that of the *ergon*'s. This realization is for example what leads Hildegard Hawthorne to conclude that there is in fact not one fair, not one narrative, not one *story*, but three. Upon this realization that the “world” inside the buildings is separate and different to that of their exterior, many resorted to merely occupy one “world,” to chose a favorite, as indicative of Hawthorne's quote, and eschew the schizophrenia of fiction entirely. Van Brunt's effort of “counterbalance” thus in practice led instead to an imbalance, a resistance to interact with the exhibitions at all. They succeeded entirely with their purpose for the architecture chosen; the result was a unity of style, form and color, and

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<sup>211</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology*...op. cit. p. 150-151

<sup>212</sup> Jacques Derrida, op. cit. pp. 81-82

architecture as art and not engineering. Yet in doing so they neglected the unity of narrative. The effect is then as mentioned a preference for the unity and harmony experienced in the grounds and a view of the rest of the fair, the actual fair so to speak, of the exhibitions and Midway Plaisance, as different parts, as different fairs altogether. The results of this narrative, of its *story* and the *fabula* it fostered, is then not only a disconnect between the *parergon* and the *ergon* which led to confusion and wanderlust once inside the buildings, but which encouraged other thoughts and behavior entirely than those of the exhibitions. Arnold Lewis writes about this phenomenon that:

The creators of the scene had been successful in making a real mirage... From a manufacturer's standpoint, a mirage was antithetical to the interests of international trade. The spectacle kept fairgoers outside instead of inside, encouraging them to fantasize instead of investigate. They dotted on something unattainable instead of something tradable<sup>213</sup>

James Gilbert further writes about the detrimental effect of the architecture on its interiors:

This principle of architectural costume meant that the commercial purpose of the central core of buildings was not readily apparent. Indeed, many visitors mistook the purpose of the White City (as they were perhaps intended to) as a celebration of art and harmony when, in fact the purpose of the exhibits was at least as much to display commercial products... While based upon commerce, selling, and advertising, this portion of the Exhibition with its ubiquitous statuary and classical gigantism, its planned walk and waterways, warred with the commercialism of its interiors.<sup>214</sup>

Business commentators were scathing in their reviews of the fair from a commercial viewpoint, letting their voices heard in the influential trading journal *Printer's Ink*. Its editor called the fair a "magnificent failure" as an advertisement and business venture, another described the architecture as "utterly bad advertising" and "fearfully tiresome to the eyes."<sup>215</sup> In practice too the "functionalist" interior were not without problems with exhibitors reporting issues of bad lighting, ventilation and information (signs, maps etc.) something that would only have compounded the visitor's preference for the carefree exterior. Observers noted that this effect was again strengthened by what has been called a "hypertrophy of sight." This was especially noted by foreign observers, who feared that the American fixation on

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<sup>213</sup> Arnold Lewis, op. cit. p. 180

<sup>214</sup> James Gilbert, op. cit. pp. 101,102

<sup>215</sup> *ibid.* p. 102

monumentality and size would simply render it too expensive for anyone else to host future exhibitions. For the general visitors though this hypertrophy of sight simply meant more to see and spaces to explore, one could spend days exploring the grounds without entering a single exhibition hall and still not see it all. Even the spectacles of the night focused on the facades and the outside:

...On its either side were the famous Electric Fountains, which at night discharged streams of water in which all colors were blended and which assumed every shape that ingenuity could give. At one moment they appeared like pillars of fire, and at another they seemed to be volcanoes sending forth streams of molten fire and lava; the skillful manipulation of the electric illumination transformed them into fearful and uncanny fires, changing in an instant to the similitude of harvested sheafs of wheat... Truly the Court of Honor won admiration. The statuary, the columns of victory, the fountains, the great white buildings... - who that saw them once can forget the magnificent spectacle they made.<sup>216</sup>



Figure 31.  
Nocturnal view of the Court of Honor towards the Administration Building

The attention given to layout of the grounds as an ideal city, separate from the boisterous Loop or the exoticized Midway, and the landscape design under the auspices of Olmsted, gave Jackson Park the air of a pleasure ground, a place for strolls and Sunday retreats, for respite and delight. A place to see and be seen where the element of vision was paramount. Inhabiting an increasingly material and industrial world, the visitors were often more than willing to oblige the designers

in their dream city, to give in to the alluring illusion of a life, a city, bathed in beauty, order and prosperity. As in Europe, life in the constantly growing cities was changing, with the little free time people had (or, with the abundance of free time in the case of the upper classes) they often preferred to spend it outdoors if possible. Away from the crowded tenement houses and cluttered factories, and instead seek out the open spaces of the broadening streets and “nature” in the expanding park systems.

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<sup>216</sup> R. E. A. Dorr, Esq. op. cit. pp. 6-7

Unable intellectually to control the complex and dazzled by the luminosity of its parts, observers experienced it optically as a series of fragments. Whittingly or unwhittingly, the designers of the exposition, despite employing styles from a distant past, affirmed a contemporary sensibility – the shift from absolutism to relativism, from the tactile to the visual. They had created a contradiction in terms, an architecture more suggestive than substantive, which, like the ballet scenes of Degas and the Paris streetscapes of Pissarro, implied greater sensitivity to movement and temporal multiplicities, phenomena too evanescent for the promotion of material progress. The delights the setting offered to the eyes upstaged the delights it offered to the mind.<sup>217</sup>

The *text* created by the designers as such invites a conclusion, of the *story* through the visitor's *fabula*, of the frame as not frame, but work. Of the architecture not as *parergon*, but *ergon*. It is easier this way, it all fits; unity of style, purpose and content, with the architecture itself at the centre as content. *Concinnitas* achieved. The other buildings and Olmsted's landscape the better frame, the easier fit. Derrida as imparted, states: "A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done, the fact, the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside."<sup>218</sup> How much better does this not describe the surrounding grounds cooperating with the buildings than the buildings cooperating with the exhibitions. The exhibitions then unfortunately seem to distinctly "fall to one side," lacking support, lacking parergon, forced to try to convey their own *story* where one has already been firmly entrenched. Needless to say, the interiors and the exhibitions were still visited, but in the sources used the effects of prior world's fairs were to an extent missing, and the desired commercial effect as mentioned absent. The result, for these fairgoers at least, was a fair of separate parts, of separate worlds, resisting each other, and hence the visitor, with exhibition halls facilitating space, but of a different kind. Where their insides does not exist and the where the actual exhibition takes place *in* the frame, neither inside, nor outside.

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<sup>217</sup> Arnold Lewis, op. cit. pp. 179-180

<sup>218</sup> Jacques Derrida, op. cit. p. 54



## 5.

### Vanishing city

It has vanished like the castles  
Fancy buildeth in the air;  
But not we like weeping vassals.  
Wring our hands in mute despair.<sup>219</sup>

On July 5<sup>th</sup> 1894 fire swept through the Court of Honor and consumed most of its buildings. Since the closure of the exposition the year before the grounds had grown derelict. A warning had been given in January of the same year when a fire broke out in the casino and destroyed it together with the adjoining Peristyle and Music Hall. After the closing ceremonies was canceled due to the assassination of mayor Carter Harrison, Sr.<sup>220</sup> the fair closed in silence and the buildings remained as empty shells as the city and the organizers had not decided upon what to do with them in the exposition's aftermath. Hubert Howe Bancroft writes in his *Book of the Fair* that: "After the close of the Fair the white city became a white elephant...Few wanted the buildings at any price, either for removal or for their materials."<sup>221</sup> As a result of the harsher economic climate after the "panic of 1893"<sup>222</sup> the buildings did not receive much interest, either as parts, scrap or for relocation, with the highest bid coming at 80,000 dollars, or about one percent of their cost. So White City became a ghost town, deserted, but with its frame still intact, until that day in June. Bancroft writes:

On the evening of the 5th of July some lads at play near the terminal station observed the gleam of fire within, and entering the depot tried for several minutes to stamp it out; but these few minutes were fatal to the existence of several among the most sightly temples of the Fair. It was a hot summer day; the buildings were dry as tinder; water was scarce; the fire engines far away, and a fierce gale was blowing from the southwest.

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<sup>219</sup> H.H. Van Meter, *The Vanishing Fair*, (The Literary Art Company: Chicago, 1894) p. 13

<sup>220</sup> Harrison was murdered in his home by one Patrick Eugene Prendergast on October 28<sup>th</sup> 1893, two days before the official closing of the fair.

<sup>221</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair*, (Chicago: The Bancroft Company, Publishers, 1893) p. 960

<sup>222</sup> 1893-1897, a result of the collapse of the railroad market and overproduction, one of the most severe economic depressions in US history before The Great Depression of the 1930's. For an in depth analysis of the panic Douglas W. Steeples' and David O. Whitten's *Democracy in Desperation, The Depression of 1893*, (Greenwood Press: Westport CT, 1998) is a good account.

The fire spread quickly from the terminal building to Administration and from there to Mining, Electricity, Machinery, Transportation, Agriculture and lastly to the giant Manufactures building:

The burning of the Manufactures building was a sight that will never be forgotten by those who witnessed this tragic climax in the destruction of the white city. Then it was seen that the whole interior was aflame, while from hundreds of windows tongues and jets of fire cast far on the dun waters of lake and lagoon their red and fearsome glare. Presently the frame began to totter; one after another the huge facades fell inward with a deafening roar, and of this mammoth temple of the Exposition there was nothing left, save for the lurid skeleton of a wall.<sup>223</sup>

The dream had ended and its remains vanished in the air, leaving only carcasses of engineering behind. A more solemn mood had long since descended on Chicago and on the country in general as a result of the ongoing recession, and the festivities of the fair seemed all of a sudden an eternity away. Henry Adams would note that “everyone is in a blue fit of terror, and each individual thinks himself more ruined than his neighbor.”<sup>224</sup> Chicago and the Midwest were especially hard hit by the downturn and it seemed for a time that the legacy of the fair would be but as a nostalgic memory. (Chicago had at its lowest point almost 200,000 unemployed). But as fortunes improved and cities expanding once more in the latter half of the decade, thoughts again turned to the fair and its perceived lessons.

Financially the fair had been a moderate success, with profits, after all expenses were paid, totaling around 2 million dollars,<sup>225</sup> which was paid back to the shareholders. (Even with these dividends though, shareholders only got back about 10 cents on the dollar invested)<sup>226</sup> Although many exhibitors complained about the lack of sales and focus on commercial aspects there were still large orders for duplicates and many exhibitions went on to be exhibited at the many regional expositions after the main fair had ended. The fair helped to diffuse new technologies, especially electricity, and open up wider markets for these.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft, op. cit. p. 961

<sup>224</sup> Henry Adams as cited in: Douglas W. Steeples and David O. Whitten, *Democracy in Desperation, The Depression of 1893*, (Greenwood Press: Westport CT, 1998) p. 1

<sup>225</sup> Chaim M. Rosenberg, op. cit p. 260

<sup>226</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft, op. cit. p. 959

<sup>227</sup> For electricity's role in society at the time see: David E. Nye's *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology 1880-1940*, (MIT Press: Cambridge MA, 1992)

Architecturally and socially though, the fair must be said to have had a much greater impact. In remembering the fair Hildegard Hawthorne writes this about its memory:

I shall never see the Fair again, and yet I have but to close my eyes and open those of my memory, and there it is! and will be until I forget all things. It stands in its white beauty, bathed in sun or fair light,... and its changeful waters, holding the glimmering shadows of its loveliness. Like those reflections it is destined to vanish from the world. But in truth it is immortal; its virtue will spread over all the earth, borne in men's hearts and memories, and bearing who knows what gracious fruits?<sup>228</sup>

The fair undoubtedly made an indelible impression on Hawthorne as it seems to have done on all visitors in one way or another. Hawthorne as one may read emphasized the artistic and beautiful aspects of it, Henry Adams on the other hand stressed the political and social ones. Nearly all works dealing with the exposition includes somewhere Adams' quote that it "...was the first expression of America thought as a unity,"<sup>229</sup> and in the process often relating it to his opinion of it and the exposition's importance, but one could for example also quote Adams when he stated that:

...since Noah's Ark, no such Babel of loose and ill-joined, such vague and ill-defined and unrelated thoughts and half thoughts and experimental outcries as the Exposition, had ever ruffled the surface of the lakes...for the moment he seemed to have leaped directly from Corinth and Syracuse and Venice, over the heads of London and New York, to impose classical standards on plastic Chicago. Critics had no trouble in criticizing the classicism, but all trading cities had always shown traders' taste, and, to the stern purist of religious faith, no art was thinner than Venetian Gothic. All traders' taste smelt of bric-a-brac; Chicago tried at least to give her taste a look of unity.<sup>230</sup>

In his passage on the fair it is evident that Adams enjoys it, is unsure of what it all means, but that it poses for the first time the question if "whether the American people knew where they were driving." Adams answers that he does not know, and does not think they know either, but that they were at least driving there together, with further conclusions not necessarily so easy. Similarly, of the "fruits" of the fair being gracious or not, is not easy to conclude on, and is not for this work to judge, but of the virtues spreading "over all the earth" (or at least all

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<sup>228</sup> Hildegard Hawthorne, op. cit. p. 293

<sup>229</sup> Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 (first published 1918)) p. 288

<sup>230</sup> *ibid.* p. 285

over America), of which direction things were going, of where America was driving after the fair, one might mention some key aspects.

The most visible, and the most written about, legacy of the fair must be said to be the popularity and preponderance of Neoclassical and Beaux-Arts architectural styles in the decades succeeding the World's Columbian Exposition. This includes especially the Midwest and the West which at the time of the exposition were more or less in their formative years in terms of infrastructure and large public works. One need for example only take a look at the many state capitol buildings, libraries, railway stations and museums being erected in the years following the fair to see the popularity of the academic styles. If this was caused or merely aided by the exposition is of course another matter. Sullivan and his followers were later as mentioned unequivocal in their belief of where the "blame" lay, others may point to that the trend was already well on its way by for example the practices of many eastern architects, particularly McKim, Mead and White. William H. Wilson, biographer of the City Beautiful Movement, for example states that "...the fair was an amalgam of artistic, architectural, and engineering practices already applied in the United States,"<sup>231</sup> that the fair greatly quickened and encouraged such practices, but did not "invent" them, but whatever the truth there can as Hitchcock writes "...be no question that the influence of the Fair in America was very great indeed."<sup>232</sup> The popularity of the styles were moreover also due to their perceived civic effect, it was believed, as was the case in White City, that buildings and areas of this type would be fertile of fostering a higher quality of urban living and hence a more civilized population. The efforts to employ this more permanently has later come to be known as the City Beautiful Movement<sup>233</sup> and Wilson, in his book on the topic, writes about the fair that:

It is now evident that the White City was the focus of a wide variety of nineteenth-century advances related to the City Beautiful Movement: sanitation; aesthetics; rationalized urban functions; women's

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<sup>231</sup> William H. Wilson, op. cit. p. 57

<sup>232</sup> Henry-Russell Hitchcock, op. cit. p. 325

<sup>233</sup> As Wilson writes the movement had its heyday from about 1900-1910 and saw "middle- and upper-middle-class Americans attempt to refashion their cities into beautiful, functional entities. Their effort involved a cultural agenda, a middle-class environmentalism, and aesthetics expressed as beauty, order, system, and harmony. The ideal found physical realization in urban design...The goal beyond the tangibles was to influence the heart, mind, and purse of the citizen. Physical change and institutional reformation would persuade urban dwellers to become more imbued with civic patriotism and better disposed toward community needs. Beautiful surroundings would enhance worker productivity and urban economics." William H. Wilson, op. cit. p. 1

involvement in culture, civic improvement, and urban reform; building design; artistic collaboration; architectural professionalism; and civic spirit.<sup>234</sup>

Besides the architectural styles White City here encouraged a new urban ideal. An ideal based on space, order and urban planning and social control.<sup>235</sup> Burnham himself would for example devote much of his remaining life and professional career to new urban schemes based on his experiences in Jackson Park. This would result in plans for the redevelopment of for example Chicago, Cleveland, San Francisco and Washington D.C.<sup>236</sup> Of these the MacMillan plan for the National Mall in Washington D.C. was the one executed to the furthest degree of completion, of others, where Burnham was not involved, one could mention the plans for Denver and Kansas City. In their simplest form these schemes, as White City did, aimed at creating ordered spaces of respite, where one could instill some “rest, grace and harmony” to compensate for the boisterous industrialism and materialism of the times. As the clamor of the panic gave way to a new optimism at the dawn of a new century, this seemed to be the fairs most vivid living memory. Yet many would argue that, as the fair itself, the later efforts of the City Beautiful Movement largely remained superficial, albeit with often great lasting effect, that it escaped the internal needs of the city (jobs, housing, places of production, etc.), in exchange of tree lined boulevards and institutions of order. Just as White City in a large degree attempted to escape the Midway Plaisance and its own practical function and commercial aspect, but in the process perhaps not fully grasping their offsetting importance in terms of their facilitating its own existence. That in “counterbalancing” the “philistinism” of the times, White City itself needed a measure of counterbalance which it found in the

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<sup>234</sup> William H. Wilson, op. cit. p. 60

<sup>235</sup> For all of Wilson’s exuberant and well researched work this aspect is there somewhat lacking and one would do well to also for example read Tony Bennett’s *The Birth of the Museum*, (Routledge: New York, 1995) and particularly chapter 2: *The Exhibitionary Complex* for more on this aspect. Here Bennett for example says about this in relation to expositions, and the idea that increased social control lay in the “opacity” of the mechanisms of order. That the organizers there “...sought to allow the people, and *en masse* rather than individually, to know rather than to be known, to become the subjects rather than the objects of knowledge. Yet, ideally, they sought also to allow the people to know and thence to regulate themselves; to become in seeing themselves from the side of power, both the subjects and the objects of knowledge, knowing power and what power knows, and knowing themselves (ideally) known by power, interiorizing its gaze as principle of self-surveillance and, hence, self-regulation.” pp. 62-63

<sup>236</sup> For more about Burnham’s urban plans see: Thomas S. Hines, *Burnham of Chicago*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974)

Midway.<sup>237</sup> Without reality one could not have the dream, the dream would be empty, and without the dream, reality would be intolerable; complications generating the greater stories.

## Concluding remarks

When in hindsight considering the “virtues” of this work, this thesis, there are equally aspects which may be noted upon in its evaluation. Of the conclusions drawn in terms of the buildings architectural quality one may naturally observe that in aiming to provide a corresponding cumulative effect of inside and outside, and frame and content, there are several ways in which this could have been achieved. If this work seems to advocate the style of the Loop as the preferred option for the architecture of the exposition’s exhibition halls it is by way of being distinctly contemporary and as such ensuring parity with the exhibited content in the two buildings dealt with. Further, the expositions mission was to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus’ landing and the progress the nation had since made, and as was the norm of the great expositions to date, this was commonly done by evoking the past, the present or the future of the exposition’s organizers and location. This would in the case of America and Chicago provide numerous possibilities, including the one chosen, as the city and region of the Mid-West was largely devoid of an architectonic past. Nevertheless the chosen path, of creating an American civilization hallmark of sorts through the synthesizing of European ones, was by most factors a surprising one given the options and circumstances (although one could naturally argue that esthetically and “artistically” it was an obvious one if these aspects were given supremacy). With that said and done, and as elaborated on with the architects having a different perception of their *purpose* with commissions of this type, there are still herein potentials which could have been explored. With the professed emphasis on unity and harmony of parts, and as following the dictates of tradition through *concinnitas*, the architects of the Court of Honor ignored a central aspect, the integration of the inside into the

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<sup>237</sup> At the time of the fair some certainly did understand the importance of the Midway, but that in White City’s success its lessons seem to an extent lost on the later City Beautiful Movement. Higinbotham for example wrote at length on the topic in his *Report of the President*, stating on pages 469-470 that: “Had the many concessions located upon the Plaisance been scattered indiscriminately throughout the Exposition grounds, unquestionably the dignity or the stateliness of the Exposition as a whole would have been injured beyond forgiveness, but, located as it was, separate from the Exposition proper, so that those who were not disposed to visit the sights to be seen there did not have them forced upon them, the Plaisance was a feature from the absence of which the Exposition would have suffered greatly. People wish and expect to be amused as well as instructed by an exposition, and if the amusement is not such as to degrade, there is no reason why it should not properly be a part thereof, especially if nearly all of the amusements are more or less instructive.”

unity of the whole. As the architectural historian Rudolf Wittkower stated about Alberti and the Renaissance principles of construction: “The conviction that architecture is a science, and that each part of a building, inside as well as outside, has to be integrated into one and the same system.”<sup>238</sup> And that through the employment of *concinnitas*, as mentioned, even opposing elements and design should be unified as to make a sympathy between parts. In our case one could imagine that this could have been better achieved if for example the same use of material and ornamentation on the inside as well as the outside. One would still have the issue of the opposing natures of the exhibited material with the connotations of the architecture, but they would be housed in complete and integrated buildings instead of entities existing only from the outside, or only in the frame. It must be said though, that in working with this material and the reasons behind the manifested results, rash judgment towards their “quality” no longer seems so easy. When looking at the choices made, many of them are perfectly understandable in their own light and that the architects seems to an extent to have achieved their goals, and that may be appreciated, as it was by the millions at the time, even if one does not necessarily agree with them.

In considering the theoretical and methodological tools used in this work there are also some features worth contemplating upon. When attempting to comprehend the choices made by the involved architects the reading of theoreticians, which they themselves would have studied, as for example Viollet-le-Duc, Semper and Alberti, proved invaluable. Here the cited work by Caroline van Eck: *Organicism in nineteenth-century architecture, an inquiry into its theoretical and philosophical background*, was especially helpful in understanding a key aspect of the architectural discourse at this time. This field of architectural theory is further far larger than what could be encompassed in this work, and if one had the opportunity one would probably do well to investigate this in more depth, and in such a way gain an even deeper appreciation of the field at the time and hence the choices made. Here one could quickly mention for example John Ruskin, Horatio Greenough, Henry Hobson Richardson. The field of exhibition history, and of the great expositions in particular, would also be well served with greater consideration and mention in a wider study. This would help in better understanding the tradition the Chicago fair entered and how it differed from the earlier (and later) expositions. In general though, the experience has been that these sources in cooperation with

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<sup>238</sup> Rudolf Wittkower from *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, as cited in Caroline van Eck, op. cit. p. 46

the material related to the planning process, especially the *Final Report* by Burnham, the essays by Van Brunt and the biographies on Root and Burnham, have been very sound and led to a new insight into the underlying causes of the exposition's architecture. And as such was a crucial exercise that was needed before attempting to analyze that architecture and how it functioned in practice.

In using Mieke Bal's narratological approach, which is first and foremost designed for textual analysis (although as stated apt for use anywhere a narrative might be said to exist), a complimentary dimension was needed to deal with the architectural and structural elements in the story. Here again a theory from a related field was chosen in the form of Jacques Derrida. These two might at first glance seem contrary in style and method, but do in fact have several things in common, and then primarily the concept of the frame and its meaning, and Derrida himself analyzes narratives of sorts, although in a reversed order. As Derrida did not write to facilitate, but to complicate, his teachings are not the easiest to transfer and accommodate, but though it is sometimes seems reluctantly implemented, the experience in this work is that it does in fact work well as a means of exploring architectural realms and open them up to new ways of seeing, which can then for example be done through narratology as it has here. Narratology then on the other hand is a very open and multifaceted approach which was found to be quite accessible and nimble. Its shortcomings as used here might be said though that one is rendered reliant on contemporary accounts and descriptions, and especially their reliability, on parts of the analysis. Luckily, in the case in question, first hand sources are plentiful, but which may again lead to questions of either contrasting views in these sources, or one sided views if many accounts convey identical experiences. In this case the latter would be the most pressing, as the many of the sources were directed through the fair's office of public relations and all official guidebooks had to be approved by this office. This does not necessarily exclude them or render them moot, but it was felt that unbiased sources would give the best and reliable impressions of how the architecture's narratives affected and enveloped the visitor. As such none of the ones used for this intention (primarily Hawthorne and Dreiser) seem in any way artificially construed or coopted. With other sources, and methods, the results might have been different (although none have been unnaturally omitted). In all, the finds derived and conclusions drawn felt to be logical and probable. As a composite method the chosen approach is felt to have functioned well, and more than served *its* purpose, of exploring and shedding light on some facets and some narratives of the fair. If one were to



research other stories, other events of the fair,<sup>239</sup> the approach might also be another. What is clear though, through researching and writing this work, is that it is exactly the paradoxes and “faults” of the World’s Columbian Exposition that make it so fertile and interesting a topic to explore. That what was long criticized and tried forgotten by the modernists through to the 1970’s was exactly what was put to the forefront by the later postmodernists when looking at the peculiar polyglotism of this major event, in not only exposition history, but American history. Still with parts of it often admonished in certain aspects, as is the case in this work, but in the form of critique, to examine the material on its own merit, rather than through mere criticism and castigation. Hopefully this work can be added to this field of critical studies.

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<sup>239</sup> As for example Robert Rydell have done in his *All the World’s a Fair, Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*, (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1984)

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Charles Dudley Arnold, 1893

People looking southwest from Manufactures Building

Courtesy of The Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago

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### Figure x.

Entrance ticket to The World's Columbian Exposition

Courtesy of The University of Maryland

<http://www.lib.umd.edu/artarch/exhibition/1893/gallery11.html>

### Figure 1.

Unknown photographer, unknown date

The Home Insurance Company Building by W.L.B. Jenney

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The Monadnock Building, by Burnham & Root

Courtesy of The Monadnock Building

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The Ashland Block by Burnham & Root

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Memorial Hall at Harvard University by Van Brunt & Ware

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Boston Public Library by McKim, Mead & White  
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New York World Building by George B. Post  
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Daniel Burnham ca. 1891  
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Map by Rand McNally ca. 1893  
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Map by Rand McNally ca. 1893  
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Charles Dudley Arnold, ca. 1892  
Manufacturers building under construction.  
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Charles Dudley Arnold, ca. 1892  
Administration building under construction.  
Courtesy of The Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago  
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Charles Dudley Arnold, ca. 1892



Transportation building under construction.  
Courtesy of The Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago  
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Charles Dudley Arnold, 1893  
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Electricity Building, Interior view, with Edison's electrical tower  
Courtesy of The Field Museum  
[http://www.flickr.com/photos/field\\_museum\\_library/3410235128/in/set-72157616234589478](http://www.flickr.com/photos/field_museum_library/3410235128/in/set-72157616234589478)

**Figure 25.**

Lewis W. Starks, 1893  
Electricity Building, Interior view  
Courtesy of The Brooklyn Museum  
[http://www.flickr.com/photos/brooklyn\\_museum/2784209755/in/set-72157606873382962/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/brooklyn_museum/2784209755/in/set-72157606873382962/)

**Figure 26.**

Unknown photographer, 1893  
Machinery Hall, Interior view  
Courtesy of The Field Museum  
[http://www.flickr.com/photos/field\\_museum\\_library/3573566968/in/set-72157616234589478](http://www.flickr.com/photos/field_museum_library/3573566968/in/set-72157616234589478)

**Figure 27.**

Unknown photographer, 1893  
Machinery Hall, Interior view, Westinghouse exhibit with Tesla generators.  
Courtesy of The University of Pittsburgh  
<http://www.neuronet.pitt.edu/~bogdan/tesla/chicago.htm>

**Figure 28.**

William Henry Jackson, 1893

The Grand Basin, With The Electricity Building on the left, Manufacturers on the right and  
Courtesy of The Field Museum

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/field\\_museum\\_library/3409426413/in/set-72157616234589478/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/field_museum_library/3409426413/in/set-72157616234589478/)

**Figure 29.**

Unknown photographer, 1893

The Grand Basin: MacMonnies Fountain with its Columbia statue in the foreground

Courtesy of The Brooklyn Museum

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/brooklyn\\_museum/2784214063/in/set-72157606873382962/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/brooklyn_museum/2784214063/in/set-72157606873382962/)

**Figure 30.**

Lewis W. Starks, 1893

Bridge over south canal between Agriculture Building and Machinery Hall. Courtesy of The Brooklyn Museum

Courtesy of The Brooklyn Museum

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/brooklyn\\_museum/2784208475/in/set-72157606873382962/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/brooklyn_museum/2784208475/in/set-72157606873382962/)

**Figure 31.**

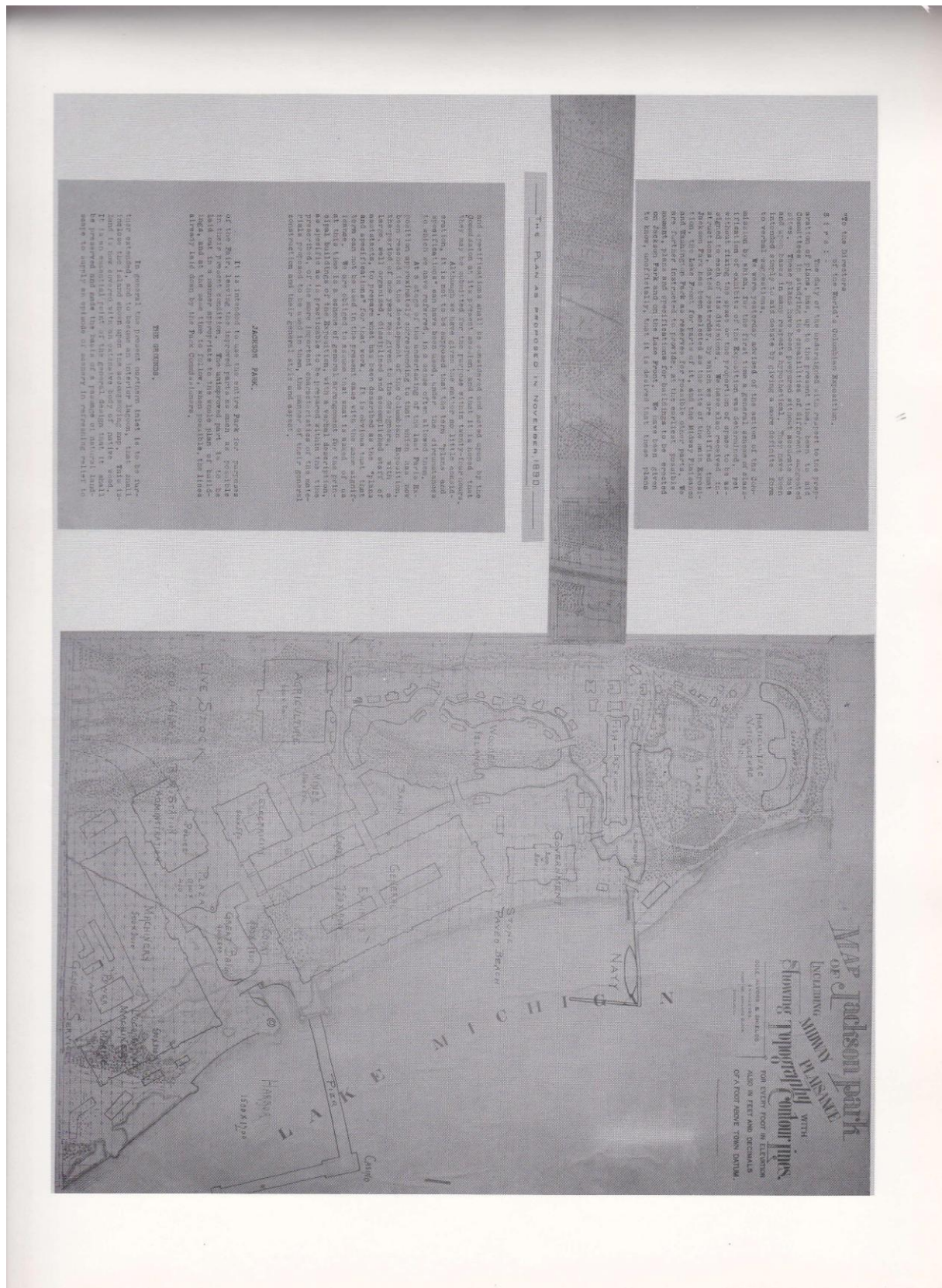
Unknown photographer, 1893

Nocturnal view of the Court of Honor towards the Administration Building

Courtesy of The Brooklyn Museum

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/brooklyn\\_museum/2784211121/in/set-72157606873382962/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/brooklyn_museum/2784211121/in/set-72157606873382962/)

“The Plan” as proposed in November 1890. Pages reprinted from *The Final Official Report* by Daniel H. Burnham, pp. 35, 36, 39. Courtesy of Garland Publishing.





the character of the buildings, and through the other walls, the light is admitted and the air is fresh. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh.

From the lecture above mentioned a small hall containing the entrance to the main building, and from this hall the entrance to the main building is reached. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh.

The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh.

At their own expense the main hall is reached. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh.

#### TRANSPORTATION.

All public passenger railways, motor-tram, cable, electric or horse, are to serve the main building. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh.

Visitors come to the fair all year round. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh.

Outside the great open court a pier still project into the lake, and the main building is reached. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh.

At the center of the Exposition, the plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh.



THE DECEMBER 1890 PLAN.  
The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh.

is to be placed in the main building. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh.

The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh.

Across the main hall the main building is reached. The plan of the building is so arranged that the light is admitted from the south, and the air is fresh.

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# RECEIVING

The building of the Reception Hall will be a significant addition to the city's architecture. It will be a modern building, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a modern building, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a modern building, with a large hall and a large hall.

# SEVEN

The special large hall will be a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall.

# ONE

It is the building of the Reception Hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall.

# TWO

An arrangement will be made for the city of Chicago to receive all the other people. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall.

# THREE

This work will be done by the city of Chicago. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall.

# FOUR

It is the building of the Reception Hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall.

(Signed) E. L. Hanson & Co.,  
A. G. Gilling,  
Herman & Sons.

James P. Hanson, \* \* \* \* \*  
H. L. Hanson, \* \* \* \* \*  
H. L. Hanson, \* \* \* \* \*

The building of the Reception Hall will be a significant addition to the city's architecture. It will be a modern building, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a modern building, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a modern building, with a large hall and a large hall.

The building of the Reception Hall will be a significant addition to the city's architecture. It will be a modern building, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a modern building, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a modern building, with a large hall and a large hall.

and the entire reception to the city of Chicago. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall. It will be a large hall, with a large hall and a large hall.

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